

How many letters are there? – Distributivity and the Verbal Particle in Hungarian

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Abstract

This paper examines the semantic consequences of the presence and absence of the verbal particle in Hungarian sentences containing a verb of creation. Since these verbs are Definiteness-Effect verbs, the aspectual interpretation does not depend merely on the verbal particle's position – or even presence – in the sentence, as in other cases, but rather on the specific/non-specific interpretation of the object. The main claim of the paper is that the verbal particle's role in such sentences can be defined in terms of collectivity and distributivity: the Definiteness-Effect constructions – the ones without verbal particle – can only refer to collective events, and the non-Definiteness-Effect-constructions – the ones containing a verbal particle – can refer to both collective and distributive events.

1 Collectivity and Distributivity

Predicates can be distinguished from each other whether they refer to an event collectively or distributively:

- (1) Peter and Mary met.
- (2) Peter and Mary walked.

While (1) has only a collective reading, which means it describes a singular event in which Peter and Mary participated together (they met with *each other*), (2) has only a distributive reading, since it can only be interpreted as two separate walking events with one singular Agent each, namely Peter and Mary.

The easiest way to capture this difference is to use a test of cumulative reference suggested by Link (1983) and Schwarzschild (1996) (a.o.). The test depends on a semantic

property of the two classes of predicates: distributive predicates are cumulative, while collective predicates are not. Cumulative reference captures the property that distributive predicates can take singulars in their extension, while collective predicates only take plurals. If a distributive predicate holds for two or more distinct entities, then it will hold for their sums too, see (4). Collective predicates do not take singulars in their extensions, they only hold for the sum of entities, see (3).

- (3) *Peter met and Mary met \nrightarrow Peter and Mary met.
 (4) Peter walked and Mary walked \rightarrow Peter and Mary walked.

Following Landman (2000), in this paper I use the term *distributivity* for the plurality and *collectivity* for the singularity of the verbal domain. Thus distributive predicates always refer to more separate events, whereas collective predicates can only refer to a singular event. It follows that if a distributive predicate has a plural NP or a conjunct as its subject, the predicate applies to each individual the subject refers to, while a collective predicate only apply once to the set of individuals it takes as subject. In other words, distributive predicates have sums of atoms as their subject or Agent, and collective ones take a group of atoms to that role.

Landman, following Link (1983), considers the reference of plural nouns as a semi-lattice structure where the domain is partially ordered by the part-of relation and closed under join-operation:

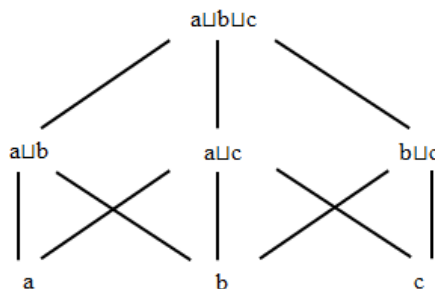


Figure 1. The reference of plural nouns – the semi-lattice

The group-forming operator (\uparrow) takes the sums of atoms and forms them into atoms:

- (5) $ATOM = IND \cup GROUP$ and $IND \cap GROUP = \emptyset$
 \uparrow is a one-one function from SUM into $ATOM$ such that:
 1. $\forall a \in SUM-IND: \uparrow(a) \in GROUP$

$$2. \forall a \in \text{IND}: \uparrow(a) = a \quad (\text{Landman 2000:100})$$

As it is stated in (5), in Landman's theory we have two distinct kinds of atoms: the individual atoms, and the group atoms, where the latter consists of sum of individual atoms. Via the group forming operation these sums are no longer determined by the part-of-structure (cf. Figure 1), and are collective individuals on their own right:

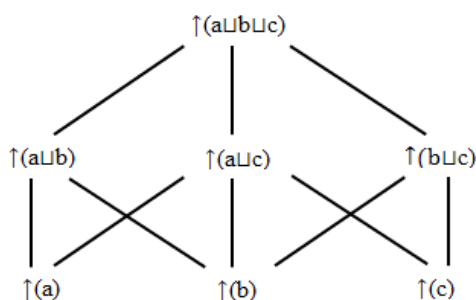


Figure 2. Group-forming

Thus (1) and (2) can be represented as follows:

$$(6) \uparrow(p \sqcup m) \in \text{MEET}$$

$$(7) p \sqcup m \in * \text{WALK (where } * \text{ is the pluralisation operator introduced by Link 1983).}$$

(6) tells us that the collective predicate *meet* takes a singular entity in its extension: a group containing the atoms Peter and Mary, whereas (7) captures that the predicate *walk* is pluralized which takes Peter and Mary as two separate atoms in its extension. So the predicate *walk*, since it is distributive, refers to as many discrete events as many individuals the noun phrase refers to as its subject – which is exactly two in our case.

Predicates which can express only one kind of reading are called inherently collective or inherently distributive (Landman 2000). *Meet* is usually considered as an inherently collective predicate, however, one can find cases where it is ambiguous:

$$(8) \text{ Peter and Mary met John.}$$

$$1. \uparrow(p \sqcup m) \in \text{MEET JOHN}$$

$$2. p \sqcup m \in * \text{MEET JOHN}$$

Landman, following Roberts (1987), highlights that a distributive reading is indeed always possible and is ultimately determined by the grammatical environment or the context.

But triggering a collective reading does not work this way: inherently distributive predicates cannot express collectivity neither with grammatical tools nor with special contextual background. This phenomenon is called “stubborn distributivity” (Schwarzschild 2011), where we find the following examples:

(9) The boxes are big.

(10) The boxes are heavy.

These examples show that while some predicates can only express distributivity (see (9)), others do not have a specific interpretation, and can express both collectivity and distributivity (see (10)).

Since most of the predicates are mixed – they have no inherent reading with respect to distributivity and collectivity – we can talk about different constructions or contexts where they can express only one of the readings. In this paper, I will focus on a specific kind of mixed predicates, the verbs of creation. I claim that Definiteness Effect-constructions¹ (henceforth DE-constructions) are such constructions where these predicates can only refer to their subjects collectively, while in other grammatical environments they rather express distributivity. This is due to lexical properties of these verbs (see section 2) on one hand, and the semantic restrictions triggered by the DE-constructions (see section 3) on the other. I will provide two different explanations to the phenomenon (see section 4), one that is based on the different event structures creation verbs have in DE- and non-DE constructions (see section 4.1), and one that is based on the role the two different construction can play in the discourse (see section 4.2).

2 Verbs of Creation

This paper investigates the semantic properties of verbs of creation regarding to collectivity and distributivity in different syntactic environments, thus it is inevitable to discuss the most important properties of such verbs in general.

¹ Definiteness Effect-constructions are the ones where there is an obligation for one of the arguments to be indefinite, like in *There is a/*the book on the table*. For more on this phenomena see Milsark (1974), Szabolcsi (1986), Keenan (2003), a.o.

As for Hungarian, the most conspicuous property of Definiteness Construction is that they lack the verbal particle *by definition*. The role of the verbal particle in a preverbal position can be captured in terms of aspect: it perfectivizes otherwise imperfective constructions. But Definiteness-Effect constructions are perfective – also *by definition* –, except for existential sentences. See more details in section 2.1 and 2.3.

2.1 The semantic and grammatical properties of creation verbs

The term “*verbs of creation*” or “*creation verbs*” highlights the most important lexical semantic property of such verbs: they refer to some kind of creation event. Based on the number of arguments they require, two kinds of creation verbs can be distinguished: there are intransitive creation verbs with only one argument as subject, and there are transitive creation verbs with two arguments, a subject and an object. The former ones refer to the formation of their Theme argument (see (11)-(13)), while the latter ones refer to the Theme being caused to become existent by the Agent (see (14)-(16)).

- (11) Született egy gyerek.
 born a child
 ‘A child was born.’
- (12) Meg-született egy gyerek.
 PRT-born a child
 ‘One of the children was born.’
- (13) Meg-született a gyerek.
 PRT-born the child
 ‘The child was born.’
- (14) Péter írt egy levelet.
 Peter wrote a letter
 ‘Peter wrote a letter.’
- (15) Péter meg-írt egy levelet.
 Peter PRT-wrote a letter
 ‘Peter wrote one of the letters.’
- (16) Péter meg-írta a levelet.
 Peter PRT-wrote the letter
 ‘Peter wrote the letter.’

The event described by the verbs of creation always lasts as long as it takes for the entity that the Theme refers to come into existence, which means that every creation event has an endpoint, and thus they are telic. The examples (11) and (14) – the DE-constructions, see in details in 2.3 – show that quantized Theme arguments can provide an endpoint for the creation events, and so

these sentences can be interpreted as perfective and telic (cf. Krifka 1992 and Verkuyl 2005). As a consequence of that, the entity referred to by the Theme has to be physically existent.

In Hungarian, most of the verbs taking a Theme argument cannot be telicized this way. Most of the transitive activity verbs can only refer to an imperfective and atelic event in a construction like (11) and (14):

- (17) Repült egy madár.
 flew a bird
 ‘A bird was flying.’
- (18) Péter énekelt egy dalt.
 Peter sang a song
 ‘Peter was singing a song.’

In these cases, perfectivity is usually expressed by the presence of the verbal particle in the verb modifier:

- (19) El-repült egy madár.
 PRT-flew a bird
 ‘A bird flew away.’
- (20) Péter el-énekelt egy dalt.
 Peter PRT-sang a song.
 ‘Peter sang a song.’

The sentences containing a creation verb can also be perfectivized and telicized in this way, as shown in (12)-(13) and (15)-(16). The main difference between the perfective and telic sentences with and without a verbal particle will be explained below.

2.2 *The problem of the Theme's reference*

For the purposes of this paper it is crucial to discuss that the reference of the Theme argument of the creation verbs is somewhat unusual. In what follows I will focus only on the transitive creation verbs and the problem posed by the reference of their Theme argument. I will address the problem of intransitive verbs of creation later.

The entity that the Theme refers to is special because it cannot exist independently from the creation event itself – this peculiarity is captured in the term *effected object*. This peculiarity does not present any problem in the DE-constructions (sentences like (14)), where the Theme

argument is indefinite and its reference is non-specific², and as such, it refers to an entity entirely new in the discourse universe.

The problem arises if the Theme argument has a specific or definite interpretation, because then it is linked to some level in the discourse. But how can something already be discourse-linked if it does not exist yet? Following Peredy (2009), I will argue that the specific or definite interpretation of the Theme argument of creation verbs always triggers an intentional-like reading of the entity the argument refers to – like in (15), where the Theme has to be specific due to the presence of the verbal particle.

Therefore a set of letters to be written by Peter is presupposed, and the one that is presented in the sentence is an element of this set. This letter is already written, however, and the relevant set contains only physically non-existent objects (since Peter has not yet written them). Hence the specific Theme argument of a creation verb implies a set of entities existing on an ontologically different level³.

As for the purposes of the paper, the problem posed by the definite argument is the most important, because its reference is always twofold:

- (21) Peter wrote the letter. It is on the table.
- (22) Peter wrote the letter. It has been on his mind for ages.⁴

While in (21) *the letter* can only refer to a physically existent object, namely the result of the writing event, in (22) the same expression refers to a plan or an intention.

Parsons (1989) briefly discusses the problem of the reference of the Theme arguments in sentences containing a transitive creation verb, but he is mainly interested in the problem that arises in progressive constructions. However, Parsons provides many statements that are relevant for the purposes of this paper.

² I use the term non-specific in the fashion presented in Maleczki (2008): non-specific arguments always introduce new discourse referents which cannot be anchored to any part of the discourse except the one that introduced them. If it is to the contrary, the argument must be specific.

³ In this paper I focus on the definite arguments, but I will mention the specific arguments where they can lead to relevant observations.

⁴ I want to thank to one of the anonymous reviewers for pointing out that the reference or antecedent of *it* in (22) is not as straightforward as the paper assumes. But the point made here is if *it* refers back to the object of the previous sentence, i.e. *the letter*, then neither the pronoun *it*, nor the definite NP *the letter* can refer to an existing object in the world, but something what was – and maybe still is – in Peter's mind. Like in *Peter finally wrote the letter that has been on his mind for ages*.

The first part of the problem that Parsons discusses can be captured as follows: since the entity referred to by the Theme argument in progressive sentences cannot exist before or during the creation event, it can only refer to *unfinished objects*:

(23) Mary is building a house \nrightarrow There is a house that Mary is building.

The second part of the problem is that despite the house in (23) is unfinished, one has no problem (and no choice but) to call it a *house*, which is usually the name of the finished object.

According to Parsons' explanation, the creation event described in progressive point of view is *by definition* an event already in progress which may not have a finished object as a result, but a part of this object must already exist, e.g. maybe a blueprint or four walls in our case. One can refer to this unfinished object with the name of the finished object just like if it was indeed the ordinary finished entity. Parsons resists handling this problem as an ontological one and a more relevant question for him is what name one uses and why to refer to an unfinished entity. The everyday experience helps to answer this question: people usually call these objects the name they would use if they wanted to refer to finished object.

Parsons' explanation may work with progressive sentences containing a creation verb, but as for perfective ones, it merely captures the heart of the problem. As for the DE-constructions – perfective sentences with an indefinite Theme argument – one finds nothing unusual: the non-specific Theme does not refer to anything but the result(s) of the creation event. However, in perfective sentences where the Theme argument has specific or definite interpretation – when the verbal particle is in the verb modifier – a clearly ontological problem arises.

Since an argument with a specific or definite interpretation is always discourse-linked, it refers to an antecedent. As for the Theme in our sentences, this antecedent cannot be an unfinished object, because there is a reference if the event has not even started yet:

(24) Peter didn't write the letter. He hasn't even started to write it yet.

In (24) there is no unfinished object, but *the letter* still has a reference. I assume, following Peredy (2009) on that, if an object is effected and has specific or definite interpretation, then it always refers to a plan or intention of the Agent. As in (24) it refers to 'the letter that Peter has written/wants to write'. The relevance of this assumption will come up in section 3.

2.3 Creation verbs and the Definiteness Effect

Verbs of creation are verbs addressing the DE. The DE covers the phenomena that some verbs (the DE-verbs) cannot have their Theme argument be specific or definite in neutral sentences (Szabolcsi 1986). In Hungarian, the group of DE-verbs has many members with different syntactic and semantic properties:

- (25) *Érkezett egy/*minden/*a vendég.*
 arrived a/ *every/ *the guest
 ‘A guest arrived.’
- (26) *Péter kapott egy/*minden/*az ajándékot.*
 Peter got a/ *every/ *the present.
 ‘Peter got a present.’

The DE is always suspended if the verbal particle appears in the verbal modifier:

- (27) *Meg-érkezett egy/minden/a vendég.*
 PRT-arrived a/ every/ the guest.
 ‘A/every/the guest arrived.’
- (28) *Péter meg-kapott egy/ minden ajándékot. Péter meg-kapta az ajándékot.⁵*
 Peter PRT-got a/ every present. Peter PRT-got the present
 ‘Peter got a/every/the present.’

The accurate classification of the Hungarian DE-verbs still poses many questions. According to Szabolcsi’s approach, every DE-verb shares the same basic property, which is their so-called EXIST meaning component. This EXIST component captures that these verbs always claim that their Theme argument becomes existent or available as the consequence of the event described by the verb. Thus the Theme argument can be neither specific nor definite, because it has to introduce a new discourse referent. If it did not do so it would lead to contradiction.

Szabolcsi builds up her classification based on the further semantic properties of the verbs, and finds the following subclasses:

- (29) Intransitive verbs expressing merely ‘existence’, e.g. *van (to be)*, *akad (happen to be)*

⁵ The conjugation of the transitive verb depends on the definiteness/non-definiteness of the object.

- (30) Intransitive verbs expressing ‘become available’, e.g. *érkezik* (to arrive), *történik* (to happen)
- (31) Transitive verbs expressing ‘cause to become available’, e.g. *kap* (to get), *talál* (to find)⁶
- (32) Transitive verbs expressing ‘cause to become existent’, e.g. *ír* (to write), *épít* (to build)

Szabolcsi’s classification seems to capture most of the crucial properties of the DE-verbs, but it is not that plain and simple, unfortunately. Kálmán (1995) draws attention to the following flaws of the system: on the one hand, it does not contain the verbs clearly lacking the EXIST meaning component, but still showing DE, like *eszik* (to eat), *iszik* (to drink), *lát* (to see), *hall* (to hear) and *olvas* (to read). On the other hand, it fails to provide an explanation why the non-DE-counterparts with verbal particle clearly have the crucial EXIST component, however, and never occur in DE-constructions (see (27)-(28)).

Thus Kálmán claims that the crucial property of the DE-constructions is that they can refer to a single occurrence of an event by presenting the culmination point – or endpoint as I mentioned before – by the Theme argument, which means these sentences are always perfective and telic.

Although Kálmán’s explanation highlights another important property of DE-verbs, it still cannot capture all of them. There are the so-called primary-DE-verbs (see (29)), the ones that are DE-verbs merely due to their lexical semantic properties. The DE-constructions with these verbs (the so called existential sentences) never have a culmination point, they describe a state, and they do not have non-DE counterparts:

- (33) Van egy sör a hűtő-ben.
 is a beer the fridge-IN
 ‘There is a beer in the fridge.’

But Kálmán’s approach addresses the many non-DE-counterparts of the non-primary DE verbs. The explanation here is that these verbs do not express any different semantic content as compared with the DE-verbs, but the sentences containing them can occur in a different level of

⁶ While I assume that these verbs show the same properties as creation verbs – at least in the matter of collectivity and distributivity – I will not discuss them in this paper.

discourse: while DE-constructions can only be discourse starters, non-DE-constructions need a somewhat specific context to be uttered felicitously.

There are many other possible classification of the Hungarian DE-verbs which I will not discuss in this paper (see e.g. Maleczki 1995), because for our purposes the two mentioned above are just enough. With Szabolesi's EXIST meaning component one can capture the most important semantic property of creation verbs that makes them DE-verbs, namely that they describe the formation of the entity referred to by the Theme argument. And Kálmán's approach makes clear that the verbal particle – as for the DE-verbs – is not a perfectivizer but has something to do with discourse – at least if DE-verbs are considered. Hereafter I will strongly rely on these two observations.

3 Verbal Particle and Distributivity

At this point we have enough information in our hands to examine the relationship between DE-constructions and collectivity on the one hand and verbal particle and distributivity on the other.

First, let me repeat the examined sentences in (34) and (35):

(34) Péter írt egy levelet.

Peter wrote a letter

'Peter wrote a letter.'

(35) Péter meg-írta a levelet.

Peter PRT-wrote the letter

'Peter wrote the letter.'

In the section before we have examined the problem of the reference of the Theme argument, and we have found that while in (34) the non-specific Theme can only refer to an entirely new entity that became existent via the writing event, the definite Theme in (35) can refer to both the physically existent letter and to a plan or intention of Peter. And the other relevant difference of the two sentences is that one can start a discourse with the DE-construction in (34), but never with (35) – this latter needs to be embedded in a special context.

Aside from these differences we have not found anything else yet. To find further relevant differences it is worth to replace the noun phrase of the agent with a co-ordinated expression:

- (36) Péter és Mari írt egy levelet.
Peter and Mary wrote a letter.
'Peter and Mary wrote a letter.'
- (37) Péter és Mari meg-írta a levelet.
Peter and Mary PRT-wrote the letter.
'Peter and Mary (each) wrote the letter.'

With this little alternation another difference between the two sentences in Hungarian becomes noticeable: while the DE-construction in (36) has only collective reading, the non-DE-construction in (37) is ambivalent in this respect and has both collective and distributive readings. I assume that the reason behind the difference of readings is the different references of the Theme arguments. In (36) the Theme refers to the physically existent letter, which is the only result of the writing event. Since a creation event lasts exactly as long as long it takes to create the object referred to by the Theme, there is always a one-event-one-result correspondence (cf. Krifka 1992). Since in (36) there is only one letter the Theme refers to I assume that the sentence describes exactly one writing event. In section 1 I have defined the term *collectivity* as the singularity of the verbal domain, thus (36) can only describe a collective event, the number of individuals the Agent refers to does not play any role with this respect.

As for (37) the reference of the Theme argument is twofold: it can refer to the existent, created object, and if it does so, it expresses collectivity as I just argued for in (36). But if the Theme refers to the plan or intention of the Agent, this argumentation simply does not hold anymore. Since the plan or the intention cannot be considered as the result of the writing event, we must drop the one-to-one correspondence which means there can be more than one writing events. Rather it is more likely that each individual who participates in the event described in (37) – namely Peter and Mary – has his/her own plan or intention, and the sentence reports that each of them succeeded in that. And because both of them fulfilled their own intentions, there has to be more writing events, which means by definition that (37) can be interpreted distributively.

However it may be fairly obvious, it is worth to emphasise that the non-specificity of the Theme is not the only reason of collective reading of (36), but the verb must be a creation verb as well:

- (38) Péter és Mari énekelt egy dalt.
 Peter and Mary sang a song
 ‘Peter and Mary were singing a song.’

Sentence (38) is ambivalent with respect to the collective-distributive readings. That is because the Theme argument of the event described by the intransitive verb *sing* never provides a proper endpoint for it, not even if it is quantized. There is no one-to-one correspondence between the number of events and objects, so it is up to the context which reading (38) will get.

And as for the DE-verbs lacking the relevant EXIST component – e.g. like *eszik* (to eat), *iszik* (to drink), *lát* (to see), *hall* (to hear) and *olvas* (to read), see the section before –, I assume their default interpretation is distributive, since they describe events which take maximum one individual as Agent, like the verb *walk* in sentence (2) in section 1. The property that makes them DE-verbs is that their quantized Theme can provide them an endpoint (cf. Krifka 1992), but they do not have any entity as a result.

For the end of this section, I have to discuss the matter of intransitive creation verbs briefly. These verbs are never ambiguous with respect to collectivity and distributivity, in fact, these are stubbornly distributive predicates. Just like the transitive creation verbs, intransitive ones also show the one-event-one-result correspondence, which means that there are always as many discrete events as many entities the Theme refers to (e.g. *Five babies were born* → there were five discrete birth events). And since these verbs never take Agents, there is no argument to which the predicates can refer collectively.

4 Possible explanations

At the end of the paper I provide two fundamentally different explanations to the phenomena presented above.

4.1 The event structure – É. Kiss (2004)

É. Kiss’s basic hypothesis is the following: she argues that the verbal particle is not a perfectivizer, since sentences can be perfective without it, as shown in (11) and (14) in section 2.1. Here I repeat the sentences under (39) and (40):

- (39) Született egy gyerek.
born a child
'A child was born.'
- (40) Péter írt egy levelet.
Peter wrote a letter
'Peter wrote a letter.'

If these sentences are already perfective, the role of the verbal particle clearly cannot be captured in terms of aspect. É. Kiss claims that verbal particles have something to do with the event structure⁷: the perfective sentences lacking the verbal particle have simple event structure, while the ones with the verbal particle have complex event structure.

Events with a complex structure can be divided into two stages: a process stage and a result stage, but ones with simple structures consist of merely one homogeneous stage. The following test⁸ can be used to distinguish the two kind of structures: the event's structure is complex if by using the adverbial *majdnem* (*almost*), the sentence becomes ambiguous, since the adverbial can refer either to the process stage and to the result stage (see (41)), but this is not the case with simple event structure – there is no ambiguity (see (42)):

- (41) Péter majdnem meg-írt egy levelet
Peter almost PRT-wrote a letter.
'Peter has not even started to write a letter.' 'Peter almost finished writing a letter.'
- (42) Peter majdnem írt egy levelet.
Peter almost wrote a letter.
'Peter has not even started to write a letter.'

This correspondence between the verbal particle and the event structure can be relevant for the purposes of this paper: one can observe that the only construction in which the creation verbs can express nothing but collectivity is the DE-construction, the only construction with simple event structure lacking the process state. Otherwise creation verbs can express both readings, because they occur in either progressive constructions – where there is merely a process state – or perfective constructions with complex event structure.

⁷ É. Kiss (2004) uses the term *event structure* in the fashion of Tenny (1994).

⁸ The test É. Kiss uses is from Piñón (2003).

É. Kiss's theory of the verbal particle may suggest that the notion of unfinished object plays an important role in the collective-distributive interpretation. The only construction it does not come up with – not even indirectly – is the simple structured DE-construction, since they only refer to the result state of the event, where the object is already finished. But it is not entirely clear what role the unfinished object would play in the perfective complex structured sentences. In section 2.2 I have already argued that the Theme argument of the non-DE sentences does not refer to the unfinished object, but to a plan or an intention of the Agent. But it is still worth keeping in mind that the event structure may have something to do with the interpretation of the sentences containing a creation verb.

4.2 The discourse – Bende-Farkas (1995), Kálmán (1995)

The other explanation focusing on the discourse-relations of the different type of sentences has more power and possibilities. As I have mentioned before in section 2.3, DE- and non-DE-constructions always occur in different levels of discourse: while DE-constructions can start a discourse, the non-DE-counterparts with a verbal particle are always discourse-related (cf. Bende-Farkas 1995, Kálmán 1995). According to Bende-Farkas, who examines the DE-phenomenon from a dynamic semantic point of view, DE-sentences always report a change in the state of the world, while non-DE-sentences cause only change in the information state. Kálmán finds that the non-DE-constructions are only felicitous if there was some kind of preparatory stage which is basically the proper context in which the sentence is embedded.

The discourse-properties of the different constructions are crucial from the paper's point of view: DE-constructions containing a transitive creation verb always introduce new discourse topics in their Theme argument, which means its reference is not linked to any part of the discourse. In other words: one does not know anything else about the entity referred to by the Theme argument but the assertion they occur in. Therefore in such constructions the quantized Theme provides merely the endpoint, and the semantic properties of the creation verbs restrict the possible readings, as I argued in section 3. It seems like the DE-constructions can only refer to and hence introduce the occurrence of singular events.

But this is not the case when it comes to non-DE-sentences, because they need an elaborated context, in which the Theme argument has an antecedent. Since the context can contain information on the Agent's plans or intentions the Theme can easily refer to it – like assumed in section 2.2 – and that makes the distributive reading possible.

5 Summary

This paper has examined the role of the verbal particle in sentences containing a verb of creation. It was already clear that the verbal particle is not a perfectivizer when it occurs in such sentences – or ones containing a Definiteness Effect verb – but rather has something to do with discourse. The DE-sentences always introduce new discourse referents, but their non-DE-counterparts with a verbal particle are always discourse-linked. This has an unexpected consequence to sentences with transitive creation verbs: in DE-constructions they can only express collectivity, whilst in any other construction they are ambiguous and can express both collectivity and distributivity. The paper found that this peculiarity is an ensemble of the semantic properties of the creation verbs, the unusual reference of their Theme argument and the context the sentences appear.

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