The Perfectivizer Particle MEG in Hungarian as the Spell-Out of Specificity
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1   The aims of this paper

- to demonstrate a phenomenon where [specificity] is clearly a feature taking part in the syntactic derivation
- to show its interaction with the aspectual structure of the sentence
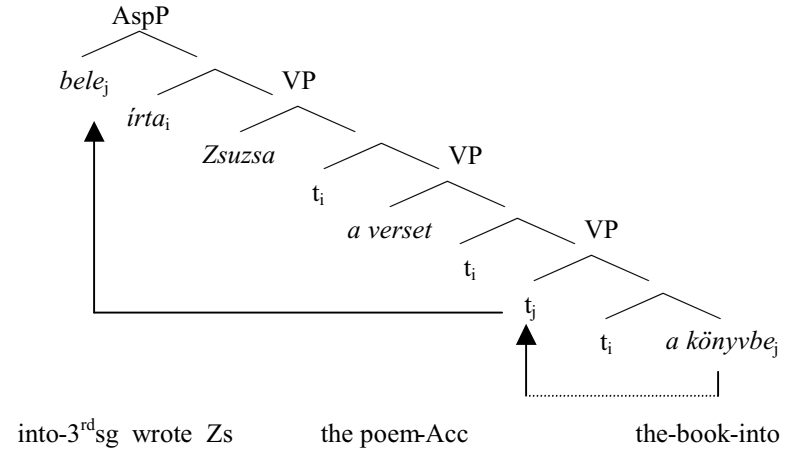
2   Verb Modifiers (VM) in Hungarian (2 types)

(1) a. *Zsuzsa   írta   a vers-et.*
    zs   wrote   the.poem-Acc
    'Zsuzsa was writing the.poem.'
  b. *Zsuzsa   meg-   írta   a verset.*
    zs   MEG   wrote   the.poem
    'Zsuzsa wrote the poem.'
  c. *Zsuzsa   írta   a vers-et   a könyv-be.*
    zs   wrote   the.poem-Acc   the.book-into
    'Zsuzsa was writing the poem into the book.'
  d. *Zsuzsa   bele-   írta   a vers-et   a könyv-be.*
    zs   into-3rd.sg   wrote   the.poem   the.book-into
    'Zsuzsa wrote the poem into the book.'

- the presence of the VM (underlined) in (1b) and (1d) results in a perfective interpretation
- the difference in choice of VM is related to the argument structure:
    - in (1b) the only internal argument is the direct object
    - in (1d) there is a locative > the VM is clearly an associate of this

Assume the following basic structure for (1d) - disregarding the optional topicalization of the subject - where the dotted arrow signifies feature copying of the endpoint argument into Spec,AspP:
(for arguments, see Ürögdi(2002))

(2) = (1d)

into-3rdsg wrote Zs   the poem-Acc   the-book-into

- **basic idea:** the features of the delimiting argument represented in (Spec, AspP) result in the aspectual interpretation in (2)

>> given the contrast between (1b) and (1d), it is desirable to claim that MEG is the associate of the Theme, as BELE is of the locative

? but MEG is not pronominal
>> it is associated with the specificity of the Theme

3   The interaction between MEG and the Theme

Transitives:

(3)   a.   *Zsuzsa   írta   a verset.*
      zs   wrote-Def   the.poem
      'Zsuzsa was writing the poem.'
   b.   *Zsuzsa   meg-   írta   a verset.*
      zs   MEG   wrote-Def   the.poem
      'Zsuzsa wrote the poem.'
   c.   *Zsuzsa   írt   egy verset.*
      zs   wrote-Indef   a.poem
      'Zsuzsa wrote/was writing a poem.'
   d.   ?*Zsuzsa   meg-   írt   egy verset.*
      zs   MEG-   wrote-Indef   a poem
      'Zsuzsa wrote a (specific) poem.'

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**- the generalization:** MEG perfectivizes predicates with specific Themes

The generalization holds for Theme arguments of unaccusatives:

(4) a.   *Meg- született   a gyerek.*
        MEG   was-born   the.child
        'The child was born.'

     b.   *Született   a gyerek.*
        was-born   the.child
        'The child was being born.'

     c.   *Született   egy gyerek.*
        was-born   a.child
        'A child was born/was being born.'

     d.   *Meg- született   egy gyerek.*
        MEG   was-born   a.child
        'A (specific) child was born.'

Unergatives (under some assumptions always having a silent non-specific cognate object) are basically never accompanied by MEG.

>> Therefore the constructions involving MEG can be treated analogously with the oblique-doubling VM's like in (2) - MEG is an expletive for (i.e. a copy of) the specificity feature of the Theme just like BELE is an expletive for the locative argument, spelled out in (Spec,AspP):

(5) = (3a)

[+spec]   wrote   Zs   the poem-Acc
'Zsuzsi wrote the poem.'
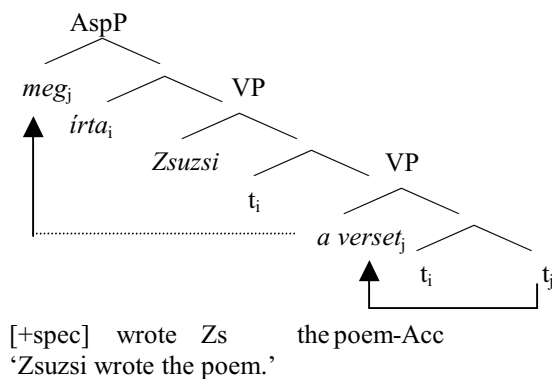
- the examples that stand out are (3c) and (4c), containing an existentially interpreted indefinite Theme > Proposal: (Spec,AspP) contains an existential closure (also originating from the Theme) > no aspectual specification

(6) = (3c)

wrote   Zs   an apple-Acc
'Zsuzsa wrote/was writing a poem.'
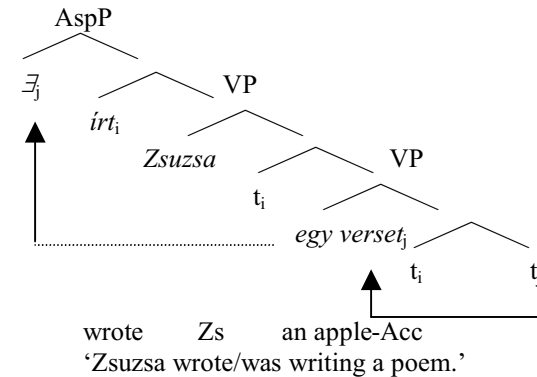
4   The Non-Specificity Effect (see Szabolcsi(1986), Kiss(1995))

(7) a.   *Érkezett   egy vendég   /*a vendég.*
        arrived   a.guest   / the.guest
        'A guest arrived. /*The guest arrived.'

     b.   *Fáradtan   érkezett   a vendég.*
        tired   arrived   the.guest
        'The guest arrived tired.'

     c.   *TEGNAP   érkezett   a vendég.*
        yesterday   arrived   the.guest
        'The guest arrived YESTERDAY.'

- the verb 'érkezett' becomes compatible with a specific Theme only of there is an adverbial VM (7b) or Focus (7c)
- the question in present terms: why isn't MEG created in (7b) and (7c)?

Compare:

(8) *Meg- érkezett   a vendég.*
     MEG   arrived   the guest
     'The guest arrived.'

- prediction of above reasoning: whenever the Theme is the lowest-ranking argument, MEG is created > the adverb in (7b) is lower on the argument hierarchy, therefore it moves into the VM-position
- the adverb is non-aspectual, so we get the perfective interpretation by default (from the meaning of the verb), not specified in the syntax

>> the analogous sentence with a transitive verb (which can be interpreted as perfective or imperfective) should be ambiguous for aspect:

(9)   a.   *Írtam*   *a verset.*
               wrote-1st sg   the.poem-Acc
               'I was writing the poem.'
        b.   *Tollal*   *írtam*   *a verset.*
               with-pen   wrote-1st sg   the.poem-Acc
               'I wrote / was writing the poem with a pen.'

>> when a sentence like (7b) does contain MEG (which is optionally possible), the adverb should exhibit adjunct-like behavior:

(10)   a.   *Péter kocsijával*   *érkezett*   <u>*(meg)*</u>   *a vendég.*
               with-Peter's car   arrived   (MEG) the.guest
               'The guest arrived with Peter's car.'
        b.   ?*Kinek*$_i$ *érkezett*   [*a* t$_i$ *kocsijával*] *a vendég?*
               with-whose   arrived   with-the.car   the guest
               'With whose car did the guest arrive?'
        c.   *Kinek$_i$ *érkezett* <u>*meg*</u>   [*a* t$_i$ *kocsijával*] *a vendég?*

- when MEG is present in (10a), the adverbial phrase is in focus but it is not an argument, merely an adjunct

- it is a well-known fact of Hungarian that focus neutralizes aspectual differences - an instance of this is (7c) - why?

>> the topmost predication in the sentence is located in FocusP and not in Aspect - lack of aspectual specification

- MEG is also OK in (7c) - possibly two derivations, one involving the focussed element moving through the Spec of AspP on the way to Focus

5   Conclusion

- a three-way division of elements in (Spec,AspP):
      - [+Spec] >> perfective
      - nothing >> imperfective
      - non-aspectual elements (∃, adverbs, bare nouns) >> non-specified

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