

Preverbs in Hungarian Lexicography: Improving Example Sentences through Web Resources

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Abstract

This paper intends to investigate the present-day situation of Hungarian dictionaries with respect to preverbs and example sentences used to illustrate them.

The first part presents a brief overview of the theoretical complexity of the linguistic issue, in particular in the part-of-speech classification; the second one evaluates available paper-dictionaries and the different treatment of the phenomenon; the third takes into account web resources for Hungarian lexicography and types of exemplification; the final section tries to answer the question how can we exploit web resources in order to offer a more effective exemplification to dictionaries' users, especially considering perfectivizing role of preverbs.

1 Introduction

The stock of Hungarian preverbs is hardly definable. As we can see in various grammars, dictionaries or linguistic contributions to the issue, its number is not defined in a clear-cut way.

The problem concerns an historical process of grammaticalisation, since these linguistic elements go back to different constructions and we cannot establish how many are already to be considered preverbs – as part of an autonomous word class 'preverb'.

1.1 Theoretical issues in Hungarian preverbal modification

Actual Hungarian preverbs have developed from adverbs, postpositions or idiom chunks, subsequently degraded into bound grammatical items; most of them however can still occur as adverbs or postpositions and some elements are to be considered preverbs "in progress".

Forgács (2004: 63) claims that it is mainly "a matter of taste and intuition on the part of dictionary makers whether a modifier that is part of an idiom retains its relative independence or is degraded into the anterior constituent of a compound". According to Kiefer/Ladányi (2000: 480-482), some linguistic elements are not to be treated as proper preverbs – though traditionally considered as such: they discard for example *alább/ellen/végbe*, determining specific criteria to judge the *preverthood*:

- a. preverbs are not argument-type verbal modifiers;
- b. they show a perfectivizing role;
- c. they are productive.

Preverbs meet also the directionality pointed out by Jakab (1982) and semantic non-transparency, as recapitulated by Forgács, who suggests also using actual corpus data as discriminating tool in linguistic investigation: this proposal meets the idea of examining *competition* by way of *performance* and contributes especially to a more reliable check of productivity.

2 Lexicographers treating preverbs

When Forgács (2004: 81) mentions the ‘centre vs. periphery’ theory, which suggests different degrees from preverbs to adverbs, we are conscious that a fuzzy model can anything but facilitate a lexicographer, who strives for offering an indisputable and unambiguous grammatical classification to dictionaries’ users and whose task faces already factual difficulties due to the reflection of the mentioned linguistic doubts in the dictionary-making process.

2.1 Different treatment in different types of dictionary

Since various parts of speech can coexist in one and the same Hungarian verbal modifier, a solution adopted can be the complete list of every possibility, as in a recent monolingual dictionary, the *Magyar értelmező kéziszótár* (2003) and in its previous editions, differently from a well-known bilingual dictionary (looking at the Italian situation), by Koltay-Kastner (1986) – see figures 1-2:

át Q. I. hsz. 1. Jobbra v. balra ~/: <vezetőszó> fordulj jobbra, ill. balra. 2. téj Odait. II. m. 9. n. ragos szóval v. a rajta hsz-val) 1. Vmi(he)in egyik szelétől, végétől a másikig végighaladva. A téren, a folyón ~ 2. Vmely nyílás felhasználásával, rajta keresztül. A kufelyükön ~ 3. (Hatalás közben) vmit. kál. vmely helyet máni sorozati tagját érintve. Ceglédre ~ utazik. 4. Ugy, hogy vmely tárgy körbe van iktatva. Fűfalon ~ 5. kánc' biz Vminek a révén, közvetítésével. A szállón ~ szerencs meg X. Y-t. 6. Vmely idő tartama alatt. Órákon ~ 1 Vmely tekintésen túlparva. Az át meccsen ~ a győzelemig. III. lk. 1. Egyik helyről a másikra. ~kötés, ~kötés. I Vmin, vamben, ill. vmi alatt, fölött v. között haladva, irányulva (visszan vhoza). ~kötés (a lyukon, a dokkát között). I Az egyik személytől, csoporttól vmely másiknak v. másokhoz. ~nyúl, ~pártól. I <Jelentésállomány> igékben. ~egül. 2. Vmely anyagon, testen keresztülhaladva. ~jár, ~földül. I Vmely anyagon, testen keresztülhaladva, szétszakítva. ~mette, ~harap. 3. Vkit, vmit teljesen beölelve, részei közé hatolva. ~dik, ~egül. I Alaposan, minden részre kiterjedően cselekedve. ~lát, 4. Köröskörül. ~nyúlás. 5. Vmin (úpra, ill. felületesen) egész terjedelmében végighaladva. ~vétel, ~vétel. 6. Úpra és másképp, ill. más eredménnyel. ~alatt, ~szerkez. 7. A megnevezett időtartamán végig. ~olvasás [az éjszakai] [fg]

Figure 1. Lemma át in Pusztai (2003)

át I. (*hat*) 1. (*keresztül*) attraverso, per; *át meg át* da parte a parte, da cima a fondo, da capo a piedi, fin nel midollo; *az ablakon át néz* guardare dalla finestra; *árkon-ökön át* per valli e monti; *Bécsen át utazik* viaggiare per v via (di) Vienna; *a folyón át* attraverso il fiume, passando il fiume; *gyere át!* vieni qui v da me v da noi! *menjünk át!* passiamo; dall'altra parte; *menjünk át hozzá* passiamo v andiamo da lui; *az orrán át beszél* parlare nel v col naso, naseggiare; *át néz* guardare per un cannocchiale; *átzár-otzár* *át* *hív* regolare q dappertutto v attraverso ogni ostacolo; *az utca át* attraverso v dall'altra parte della strada; *borkimérés az utca át* trattoria dove si spaccia anche vino da portarselo a casa; *a város át néz*: traverso la città; 2. (*felette*) al di sopra di; *az árkon át* al di sopra dei fossati; 3. (*időben*) durante, per; *egész éven át* durante tutto l'anno; *át éven át* per due anni; *egy életén át* per tutta la vita, vita natural durante; *egész életén át* per tutto l'inverno; 4. *bal-
ra át!* fianco sinistra(o)! *jobb-
ra át!* fianco destra(o)!
II. (*fr*) *jobb-
ra át!* *csinál* volgere a destra, far fianco a destra

Figure 2. Lemma *át* in Koltay-Kastner (1986)

Depending on the context, *át* can be an adverb (*hsz* = *határozószó*), a postposition (*nu* = *névutó*) or a preverb (*ik* = *igekötő*).

Illustrating parts of speech is a useful piece of information, probably more important for L2 learners than for a native speaker of a language, the latter being less concerned about categorical definition. Nevertheless only monolingual dictionaries tend to specify if a word is a preverb or not, whereas bilingual ones do not take into consideration the matter explicitly or, if they do so, it turns out in a not precise way: Kovács-Romano (2005) as a pocket dictionary has the good point of mentioning the grammatical classification – differently from larger texts –, but it uses under the opening abbreviations the incorrect Italian “*prefisso avverbiale*” [adverbial prefix] instead of ‘verbal’. It also furnishes plus-information in definitions such as “*esprime il carattere definitivo dell’azione*” [it expresses the definite character of the action]: a linguistically rough explanation, though a rare and notable effort of giving essentials about the perfectivizing role of preverbs.

Remarkable and more precise are example sentences in the monolingual dictionary although users have not at disposal examples explaining explicitly, for example, aspectual modification added by preverb.

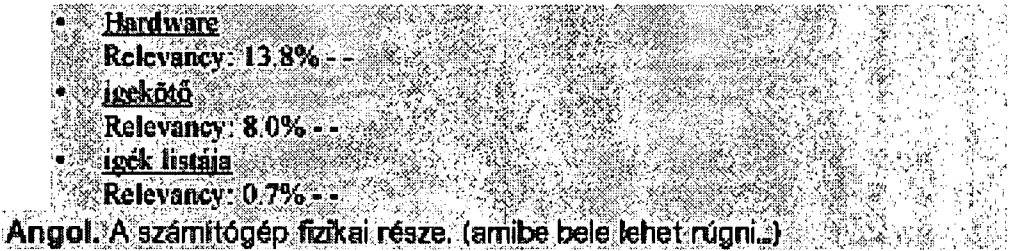
3 Evaluating web resources and example sentences

It is common knowledge that exemplification is essential for lexicographic purposes. Mainly for those dictionaries’ users who are not in direct contact with actual trends of Hungarian language, exemplification embodies a direct support for a better comprehensibility of lemmas.

The recent collaborative project *Wiktionary* (created in 2002) is intended to produce a

free multilingual dictionary.¹ It can exploit the link to its associated open-content encyclopaedia *Wikipedia* but it still lacks of examples at present: private contribution affects the language employed in lemmas definitions, which is probably nearer to users' language (see example below), but users do not provide examples and do not master linguistic details about aspect and perfectivizing function by preverbs:

Search for: **bele**



[Hung: “English. The physical part of a computer. (the one you can kick in...)”]

Also clicking on the links does not refer to examples; we have a list of ‘igekötő’ (preverbs) from the encyclopaedia but with no example sentences illustrating them.

The online *SZTAKI Szótár*² shows numerous expressions, jargon and collocations but it does not provide full examples from authentic texts – see the next example with **abba** (deleted in the list of preverbs from both Kiefer/Ladányi and Forgács):

¹ The Hungarian part is now the 14th as number of lemma forms under 146 Wiktionaries.

² The English-Hungarian dictionary was launched in 1995 as the first interactive web services in Hungary. Now it hosts five other languages.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL: <http://www.szta.hu/abba.html>. The page title is "szta ki szótár". The search bar contains the word "abba". The search options are: "word prefixes only" (selected), "no pronunciation" (selected), "Search" (checked), "Add word" (checked), "Ignore case" (checked), "Ignore accents" (checked), and "Use tables" (unchecked). The search results are displayed in a list:

any qualified matches | word prefixes only | whole words only | full matches

52 different matching expressions found:

- abba: to break off; to can; to cease; to chuck; to chuck up; to discard; to discontinue; to dismiss; to drop; to give over; to give up; to knock off; to lay aside; to lay by; to leave off; to quit; quit; to relinquish; to sign off; to stop; to switch off;
- abba: to break off; to cease; to come to nothing; to drop; to give over; to leave off;
- abba: surrender;
- abba: chuck it; come off it; come off; have done with it;
- abba: visit; to get out of sth; to shut up shop;
- abba: to keep sth;
- abba: be done; choose it; have done;
- abba: to lie off; to quit; to quit; quit;
- abba: to sheath the sword;
- abba: to lay off;
- abba: the very moment;
- abba: to raise a slogan;
- abba: to give up smoking;
- abba: the difference lies in;
- abba: to the effect that;

Figure 3. Lemma *abba* in Hungarian-English dictionary *SZTAKI*

I would here suggest the employment of evidence from corpora in order to improve the analysed situation in preverbs' treatment.

We can look at the authoritative *Hungarian National Corpus*,³ which would allow reference to authentic linguistic facts. Retrieving example sentences from corpora implicates furthermore treatment of excerpts not from the entire Web environment, but from a controlled one, where data retrieval is supported by POS-tagging. The statistical tool shows still uncertainties with respect to preverbs, assigning correctly the tag *Pre* to proper preverbs but sometimes *N.SUB* (noun in case sublativ) to other preverbs:

³ HNC, started in 1998 at the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, has the objective of being a representative general-aim corpus of present-day standard Hungarian.

- (1) hogy a franchise-bizniszben hányan mentek **tönkre** *Pre*, senki nem vezet statisztikát
[Hung: "how many go *to ruin* in the franchise business, nobody counts statistics"]
- (2) hogy a teljes élelmiszeripar **tönkre** *N.SUB* menjen.
[Hung: "how the entire food industries go *to ruin*"]

The probability that what is tagged as *Pre* is really a preverb is statistically much higher than the probability of misleading classification (the problem does not turn out in the direct query for POS 'preverbs' anyway) and we are at the end provided with a high number of real examples.

4 Improving exemplification through web resources: the case of perfectivizing preverbs

Web resources and electronic tools could support a more effective treatment of preverbs in lexicography, at least as regards exemplification, on the side of both quantity and quality of data.

Online dictionaries should offer a larger set of authentic example sentences, taking advantage of its structural peculiarities:

- more space than on paper-resources;
- interactivity;
- quick data processing.

The latter feature is available on CD-rom too; the first one, though obvious aspect, is not a reason to undervalue if we aim at completeness, precision, and use of materials as much as possible; finally the possibility of interacting does not only mean helping users in memorising and learning, it also allows the mentioned interaction with corpora.

Web resources can aim at qualitative improvements as well. Perfectivizing role of preverbs, e.g., is rarely considered and defined in dictionaries nowadays (as showed in the previous paragraphs), although it is fundamental in characterizing linguistic features of Hungarian preverbs, and it could be validated through examples combining verbs with adverbials such as 'FOR X TIME' or 'IN X TIME' (searching for specific postpositions):⁴

- (3) Lázasan írt *V.Me3*, órák **hosszat** *NU*
[Hung: "he wrote with fever for hours"]
- (4) Mennyi idő **alatt** *NU* írod **meg** *Pre* ezt a regényt?
[Hung: "In how much time do you write this novel?"]

The verb *megír* presupposes (differently from its correspondent without preverb *ír*, "write") that the action of "writing" is completed. In example (3) a verb with preverb would be not compatible with duration adverbials; in (4) *ír* instead of *megír* would generate an ungrammatical sentence due to the presence of a 'IN X TIME' adverbial.

⁴ See in the examples: *NU* = postposition. *V.Me3* = verb, past, declarative, 3rd person singular. *Pre* = verb prefix (from HNC).

Retrieving such specific exemplifying cases is possible and easier through a POS-tagged corpus: integrating it in online dictionaries would enable not only a wider repository of authentic examples, but a more efficient explanation of aspectual phenomena by lemmas such as Hungarian verbs with preverbs.

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