Acta Linguistica Hungarica, Vol. 53 (4), pp. 449–466 (2006)
DOI: 10.1556/ALing.53.2006.4.4

ON THE ROLE OF VERBAL PARTICLES IN THE PROGRESSIVE IN HUNGARIAN*

KÁROLY VARASDI

Research Institute for Linguistics
Hungarian Academy of Sciences
Benczúr utca 33.
H–1068 Budapest
Hungary
varasdi@nytud.hu

Abstract: In this paper I discuss Hungarian progressive as it is expressed in focus-free sentences whose VP possibly contains a particle (verbal prefix). I define three simple distributional tests on the basis of which logical correspondences between certain types of expressions are established. These correspondences are then used to refute the hypothesis that the progressive in Hungarian is a stativizer. Finally, I take a broader look at the possibility of predicting the existence of the progressive reading in the case of particle plus verb complexes.

Keywords: progressive aspect, verbal particles, distributional tests, stativizer, aspectual composition

1. Introduction

This paper is about the Hungarian progressive as it is expressed in focus-free sentences whose VP possibly contains a particle (verbal prefix). In section **2** I define three distributional tests that will serve as the methodological backbone of the discussion. Each of these tests is a version of traditionally well-known tests but my concern will be to establish certain relations between the classes of Hungarian expressions compatible with

* I thank László Kálmán, Márta Maleczki, Anna Asbury and Zsófia Gyarmathy for their comments on this paper. Of course, none of them is responsible for any mistakes that may have remained in the text.

them. Based on the results, in section **3** I make a distinction between two types of progressive in Hungarian. This distinction is put to work in section **4** where I criticize Christopher Piñón's theory of the Hungarian progressive, and show that Hungarian provides strong counter-evidence to the view that the progressive is a stativizer. Finally, in section **5** I take a broader outlook at the aspectual semantics of verb–particle complexes. The article ends with some suggestions for further work.

2. Three tests

In Hungarian, progressive expressions do not bear such simple morphosyntactic markers as their English counterparts. While in English the presence of *BE* plus *V-ing* signifies progressive interpretation, in Hungarian the nearest equivalent to that is a particular order of verb plus verbal particle accompanied by an even phonological stress pattern. However, as many Hungarian linguists have pointed out, this morphosyntactic pattern is only a sufficient (barring focus, see below) but not a necessary condition for a sentence to have a progressive interpretation.

A formally elaborated theory of the progressive in Hungarian can be found in Piñón (1995), and will be discussed in detail in section **4**. Based on Kiefer (1991; 1992a), Piñón introduces a battery of distributional tests which I will use here as well, though in a slightly generalized form. The terminology and tests in Piñón (1995) are as follows.

Definition 1 *A verbal expression E has an* ***event interpretation*** *iff it is compatible with time-span adverbials but not with durative adverbials:*[1]

(1) ⟨X⟩ ⟨E-zett⟩ öt perc alatt
⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ five minutes under
'⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ in five minutes'

[1] There are several ways to form durative adverbials in Hungarian beside the *öt percig* type, for example:

⟨X⟩ ⟨E-zett⟩ öt perc-en át/keresztül
⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ five minutes-on through/across
'⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ for five minutes'

As László Kálmán pointed out to me, *keresztül*, *át* and *-ig* differ in very subtle ways. However, I will ignore these minor differences in what follows and treat these phrases as completely equivalent forms expressing duration over a period.

(2) #⟨X⟩ ⟨E-zett⟩ öt perc-ig.
⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ five minutes-for.
'⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ for five minutes'

Definition 2 *An expression has a* ***process interpretation*** *iff it is compatible with durative adverbials, but not with time-span adverbials:*

(3) ⟨X⟩ ⟨E-zett⟩ öt perc-ig.
⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ five minutes-for.
'⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ for five minutes'

(4) #⟨X⟩ ⟨E-zett⟩ öt perc alatt
⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ five minutes under
'⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ in five minutes'

Definition 3 *An expression has a* ***progressive interpretation*** *iff it fits the following scheme:*

(5) ⟨X⟩ [éppen] ⟨E-zett⟩ [amikor...]
⟨X⟩ [just] ⟨E-d⟩ [when...]
'⟨X⟩ was ⟨E-ing⟩ when...'

Notice that the first two tests above are complex in the sense that they formulate conjunctive conditions. For logical reasons it is useful to disjoin these conjunctions and "factor out" their appropriate parts so that we can have logically "weaker" tests, out of which we can build up the tests used by Piñón, if required. These factors are as follows:[2]

Definition 4 *An expression has a* ***Type 1 interpretation*** *iff it is compatible with time-span adverbials:*

(6) ⟨X⟩ ⟨E-zett⟩ öt perc alatt
⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ five minutes under
'⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ in five minutes'

[2] In order to avoid unintended connotations, I introduce a neutral terminology.

Definition 5 *An expression has a* ***Type 2 interpretation*** *iff it is compatible with durative adverbials:*

(7) ⟨X⟩ ⟨E-zett⟩ öt perc-ig.
⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ five minutes-for.
'⟨X⟩ ⟨E-d⟩ for five minutes'

Finally, test **Type 3** tests the progressive interpretation:

Definition 6 *An expression has a* ***Type 3 interpretation*** *iff it fits the following scheme:*

(8) ⟨X⟩ [éppen] ⟨E-zett⟩ [amikor...]
⟨X⟩ [just] ⟨E-d⟩ [when...]
'⟨X⟩ was ⟨E-ing⟩ when...'

The above battery of tests can be used to characterize expressions in a straightforward manner. So, for example, we will say that expression E is of Type 1 iff E is admissible in the frame of Type 1, and we can represent this fact as $\mathsf{type}_1(E)$. Using this convention, we can characterize what is called a process interpretation by Piñón as follows: expression E has process interpretation iff $\mathsf{type}_1(E)$ is false but $\mathsf{type}_2(E)$ is true, and similarly for the event interpretation as well ($\mathsf{type}_1(E)$ is true but $\mathsf{type}_2(E)$ is false). Finally, the progressive interpretation can be represented simply as $\mathsf{type}_3(E)$.

In what follows, I will concentrate on VPs containing particles. Since the position of the particle in the sentence may depend on several factors that are orthogonal to the progressive aspect itself, I will confine the discussion to the simplest cases. In particular, I will only consider **focus-free sentences**, because the syntactic patterns of the progressive and the focus in Hungarian overlap, so it is expedient to treat them separately when one wants to concentrate on the progressive only.

I distinguish between two VP-types depending on the position of the verbal particle: in what I will call "prefixed VP" the particle comes immediately before the verb, and in what I will call "postfixed VP" it follows the verb. Following É. Kiss's (1998) model, we can assign the structures to them in Figures 1 and 2 respectively, though actually nothing will depend on this choice:

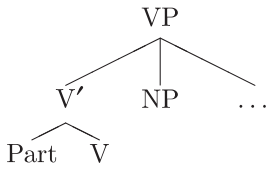

Fig. 1
Prefixed VP

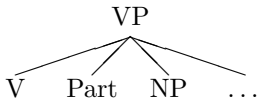

Fig. 2
Postfixed VP

3. Two types of progressive in Hungarian

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, some interesting observations can be made. First I state an important fact concerning the relationship between Type 2 and Type 3 expressions, which is as follows:

FACT 1

Type 2 ⊆ Type 3

Expressions of Type 2 are also expressions of Type 3.

In other words, whenever an expression fits the test frame for Type 2, it also fits the frame for Type 3. This means that we predict that if, say, (9) is compatible with a durative adverbial like *fél órán át* ('for half an hour'), then it will pass the test for the progressive as well. And indeed, (10) is perfectly acceptable, as is (11).

(9) esett
rain-past-3sg

(10) Fél órán át esett
half hour through rain-past-3sg
'It rained for half an hour'

(11) Éppen esett, amikor...
just rain-past-3sg when...
'It was raining when...'

Here are some more examples to illustrate the generalization. The first sentence of the following pairs shows that a certain expression is admissible in the Type 2 frame, and the second that it is also admissible in the Type 3 frame:

(12) János és Mari másfél órán át sakkoztak
John and Mary one-and-a-half hour through play-chess-past-3pl
'John and Mary played chess for one hour and a half'

(13) Mikor telefonáltam, János és Mari éppen sakkoztak
when phone-past-1sg John and Mary just play-chess-past-3pl
'When I called them, John and Mary were playing chess'

(14) János negyed órán keresztül krumplit hámozott
John quarter-of-an-hour through potato-acc peel-past-3sg
'John peeled potatoes for a quarter of an hour'

(15) Amikor megérkeztem, János éppen krumplit hámozott
when arrive-past-1sg John just potato-acc peel-past-3sg
'When I arrived, John was peeling potatoes'

(16) Robi néhány percig a másik part felé úszott
Rob some minute-for the other bank toward swim-past-3sg
'Rob swam toward the other bank for a couple of minutes'

(17) Amikor megpillantottam, Robi éppen a másik part felé úszott
when see-him-past-1sg Rob just the other bank toward swim-past-3sg
'When I saw him, Rob was swimming toward the other bank'

Fact 1 is a distributional generalization. The corresponding **semantic** generalization could be stated as a constraint on atelic expressions in Hungarian: they are admissible in both Type 2 and Type 3. Indeed, this hypothesis is borne out further by the observation that stage-level state expressions in Hungarian also belong to Type 2 **and** Type 3:

(18) Mari két hétig beteg volt
Mary two weeks-for ill be-past-3sg
'Mary was ill for two weeks'

(19) Amikor felhívtam, Mari éppen beteg volt
when call-her-past-1sg Mary just ill be-past-3sg
'When I called her, Mary was ill'

However, there are Type 3 VPs that are **not** Type 2.[3] The following examples contain VPs which are of Type 3 but not Type 2 (note that all of the examples below contain postfixed VPs):

(20) #Éva pár percig ment le a pincébe
Eve a-couple minute-for go-past-3sg prt the cellar-into

(21) Mikor összefutottunk, Éva éppen ment le a pincébe
when meet-past-1pl, Eve just go-past-3sg prt the cellar-into
'When we met, Eve was going down into the cellar'

(22) #Kata néhány másodpercig vette fel a kabátját
Kate some second-for put-on-past-3sg prt the coat-poss-acc

(23) Amikor észrevettem, Kata éppen vette fel a kabátját
when notice-her-past-1sg Kate just put-on-past-3sg prt the coat-poss-acc
'When I noticed her, Kate was putting on her coat'

In other words, Type 3 is not equal to Type 2. We can represent the relevant relationship between the appropriate sets of expressions as proper inclusion:

FACT 2

Type 2 $\subsetneq$ Type 3

The set of expressions of Type 2 is properly included in the set of expressions of Type 3.

Let us call those expressions that belong to Type 3, but not to Type 2, **proper Type 3** expressions:

$$\textbf{Proper Type 3} = \textbf{Type 3} \setminus \textbf{Type 2}$$

Now we can state an important generalization (which we hinted at above) concerning postfixed VPs:

FACT 3

Postfixed VPs are proper Type 3

All postfixed VPs are proper Type 3 VPs.

[3] This important fact, which we will use in section **4.2**, was first noted by Kiefer (1991).

At this point a caveat is in order: the appearance of the verbal particle behind the verb can also be the result of the presence of focus as in (24).

(24) JÁNOS írta meg a levelet
John-foc write-past-3sg prt the letter-acc
'It was John who wrote the letter'

But this particular VP is not possible as a progressive VP:

(25) #János éppen írta meg a levelet, amikor...
John just write-past-3sg prt the letter-acc when...

I will return to the question of predicting whether a VP is a possible progressive VP or not in section **5**.

Note that I am not claiming that postfixed VPs exhaust the class of proper Type 3 expressions. Indeed, there are well-formed expressions belonging to Type 3 that contain no particle at all, as in (26) which is a well-formed progressive sentence, although (27) is not acceptable. In what follows, however, I will ignore these instances of Type 3, and only concentrate on VPs containing particles.

(26) Éva éppen a folyóhoz biciklizett, amikor...
Eve just the river-to cycle-past-3sg when...
'Eve was cycling to the river when...'

(27) #Éva néhány percig a folyóhoz biciklizett
Eve some minute-for the river-to cycle-past-3sg

4. Piñón's theory of the progressive in Hungarian

In this section I discuss an important theory of the Hungarian progressive that is a worked-out formal proposal both from a syntactic as well as a semantic point of view. This is not to say, of course, that scholars had not dealt with the question earlier. On the contrary, Kiefer (1982; 1991; 1992a) as well as É. Kiss (1987; 1992) had looked at the topic from both a descriptive and a theoretical angle. However, it was Christopher Piñón in Piñón (1995) who proposed a unified formal theory of the progressive in Hungarian that pays equal attention both to its syntax and its semantics.

The first part of Piñón's article is polemic and aims at refuting the particular syntactic theory of the progressive operator presented in

É. Kiss (1987; 1992). He also takes a critical look at Kiefer's earlier analyses, though he seems to agree with Kiefer on several important points. In what follows I will examine the **semantic** side of Piñón's theory in details.

The principal claim of the article is expressed in Piñón's words as

> "The heart of my analysis is to postulate a difference in how progressives of process and event expressions are formed. Progressives of process expressions can be formed directly; progressives of event expressions, in contrast, cannot. Event expressions must first be converted into process expressions before a progressive can be formed. The conversion of event expressions into process expressions is overtly marked in Hungarian: it is what requires verb movement." (Piñón *op.cit.*, 162)

This approach to the progressive is motivated by Moens–Steedman (1988) and the idea of the progressive as a "coercive operator" defended therein, cf. Piñón (*op.cit.*, 169). Piñón lists three assumptions that guide his analysis. The first two postulates are of lesser importance to us now, but the following one is crucial:

> "PROG [a semantic operator—K. V.] takes only process predicates as input. In order for PROG to apply to event predicates, the latter first have to be converted into process predicates. The semantic operator PR(ocess) converts event predicates into process predicates. The morphosyntactic representation of PR is [Pr]. [Pr] also does not fill the preverbal focus position." (*ibid.*, 168)

These claims can be represented schematically as constraints on the typing of the PROG and PR operators as follows:

$$\begin{aligned}&\text{PROG}(\textit{Process});\\&\text{PROG}(\text{PR}(\textit{Event})),\ \text{where}\\&\text{PR: } \textit{Event} \rightarrow \textit{Process}\end{aligned}$$

Piñón argues in the paper that it is a mistake to locate the PROG operator (or rather, its morphosyntactic realization) in the [Spec, VP] position, as claimed by É. Kiss. Instead, he suggests a different position for it (as an adjunct of a particular X′-projection). I am not going to discuss the details of this suggestion because it basically pertains to the particular syntactic framework the analysis is couched in. Rather, I want to concentrate first on how plausible it is to suppose the existence of PR in Hungarian in the way Piñón suggests, and then I will discuss the deeper semantic assumptions behind the analysis Piñón offers.

4.1. The existence of PR

As we have seen, Piñón claims that PROG can only take process predicates as input. He also claims that "the PR operator, which 'coerces' event predicates into process predicates, effectively imposes the syntactic order of verb plus PV [particle—K. V.]" (Piñón *op.cit.*, 169), and also that "the semantic operator PR applies only if we need to convert an event expression into a process expression [...]. If we have a process expression to begin with, then PROG can apply without the mediation of PR." (*ibid.*, 178).

First note that this suggestion has the merit of explaining why it is always possible to use process expressions in the progressive. As the input of PROG must be a process, feeding a process predicate into it is always possible, as is in fact borne out by the data. But PR is only invoked when PROG needs it to convert an event predicate into a process predicate; otherwise it does not do anything. In other words, in the case of event expressions PR operates if and only if PROG does (and then it imposes the verb plus particle order), and when the input is a process expression, it does nothing. But this prompts the question immediately: What other theory-independent reasons are there for postulating such an operator?

The assumption that calls for postulating PR is that the progressive requires a process as input. This hypothesis is already present in Moens and Steedman's transition diagram (Moens–Steedman 1988, 18), where the authors claim that the progressive operator works on processes and maps them to states (the so-called progressive states).[4] However, there is no convincing evidence supporting the hypothesis that the input of the progressive operator must be a process. On the contrary, this assumption is questionable even in English. There is a class of verbs in English as well as in Hungarian that are stative and still can appear in the progressive as in (28).

(28) János éppen aludt /állt, amikor...
John just sleep-past-3sg /stand-past-3sg, when...
'John was sleeping/standing when...'

These "dynamic state" verbs are undoubtedly static (they do not imply any change), still they are perfectly admissible in the progressive in both

[4] This idea has its predecessor in Vlach (1981) where it is claimed that the progressive is a sort of "stativizer"; see below.

languages. But without this assumption the support for postulating PR seems to disappear.

Later in the analysis Piñón draws upon another assumption that I already mentioned above, namely, that the progressive is a stativizer:

> "The output of PROG is a state predicate; this is consistent with the standard view that progressives describe states (e.g., see Asher (1992) for a recent example)." (Piñón *op.cit.*, 180)

But, at least in Hungarian, there is strong evidence that this assumption is also false.

4.2. The progressive is *not* a stativizer in Hungarian

The claim that the progressive is a stativizer was first suggested by Vlach (1981), and has been accepted by many linguists since. The claim is as follows:

(29) **The progressive as a stativizer**

Whenever the progressive is true there exists a state, the progressive state, which holds as long as the progressive is true.

Let us turn to statives now. Stative expressions, similarly to Type 2 VPs, are usually compatible with durative temporal modifiers in Hungarian, as we have already seen (e.g., sentence (18)). Some further examples are:

(30) János Londonban élt húsz évig
John London-in live-past-3sg twenty years-for
'John lived in London for twenty years'

(31) A könyv fél órán át az asztalon hevert
the book half-an-hour through the table-on lie-past-3sg
'The book lay on the table for half an hour'

This compatibility only disappears when it is hard or actually impossible to find a particular event responsible for the transition into and/or out of the state described by the stative expression, either because the boundaries of the state in question are fuzzy (as in (32)), or because it is constitutive of the subject (as in (33)), or because the state is irreversible (as in (34)):

(32) #János két hétig tudta a választ.
John two weeks-for know-past-3sg the answer
'John knew the answer for two weeks'

(33) #Péter hatvan évig ember volt
Peter sixty years-for human be-past-3sg
'Peter was a human being for sixty years'

(34) #Mari száz évig halott volt
Mary one-hundred years-for dead be-past-3sg
'Mary was dead for one hundred years'

The following fact, which we will use later on, is generally true of states:

FACT 4

From points to intervals

If a state is predicable of every point in an interval, then it holds throughout the interval.

Also, stative expressions can be modified by durative adverbials measuring the temporal duration of the state:

FACT 5

Modification of states by durative adverbials

If a state holds throughout an interval, the VP describing it can be modified by a durative adverbial specifying the length of the interval.

For example, if (35) was true exactly in each and every moment of the interval [17:00,17:05], then (36) is also true.

(35) A könyv az asztalon van
the book the table-on be-pres-3sg
'The book is on the table'

(36) A könyv öt percig az asztalon volt
the book five minute-for the table-on be-past-3sg
'The book was on the table for five minutes'

Now let us take the following sentence containing a postfixed VP (the particle *le* literally means 'down'):

(37) Jóska éppen vitte le a bort a pincébe, amikor...
Joe just take-past-3sg prt the wine-acc the cellar-to, when...
'Joe was carrying the wine down to the cellar when...'

Clearly, Joe's carrying the wine down to the cellar is a well-defined event: it has a definite beginning (he takes the first step toward the door of the cellar) and, if succeeds, has a definite end (he steps in the cellar and puts down the wine). But even if he does succeed in completing the event, the following sentence is odd:

(38) #Jóska fél percig vitte le a bort a pincébe
Joe half minute-for take-past-3sg prt the wine-acc the cellar-to
Intended meaning: 'Joe's carrying the wine down to the cellar took half a minute'

This is not suprising: we have already seen on page 455 that proper Type 3 VPs, which are first-class progressives, are not compatible with durative adverbials. But if the progressive is a stativizer, then this is quite unexpected.

Note that this problem cannot be solved by claiming that the progressive can only be true at moments and, as durative adverbials require a non-null interval, the incompatibility is therefore explained. For suppose that a progressive sentence is actually true at each and every moment of a particular interval I. Then, if the progressive is a stativizer, the progressive **state** is also true at each and every moment of I. But when a state can be predicated of each and every moment of an interval then, by Fact 4, it holds throughout the interval. Then, by Fact 5, the VP is modifiable by a durative adverbial. But this is not so, as sentence (38), or any other similar sentence having a proper Type 3 VP, illustrates.

Actually, the existence of proper Type 3 progressive expressions provides a strong counter-argument to the claim that the progressive operator in Hungarian is a stativizer. For again suppose that it is, and that it pertains to **non-null** intervals. Now let a proper progressive sentence be predicated of a particular non-null interval J. Then, if the progressive is a stativizer, a progressive **state** can also be predicated of J. But when a state can be predicated of an interval, then, by Fact 5, its description is compatible with a durative adverbial measuring the length of the interval in question. But as we have seen, proper progressive expressions are **never** compatible with durative adverbials.

Putting these facts together, we can conclude that we have a contradiction both when we assume that proper Type 3 (i.e., proper progressive)

expressions can be predicated of null-intervals (moments) and when we assume that they can be predicated of non-null intervals. Since we have exhausted the logical possibilities, we must conclude that the existence of proper Type 3 progressives provides counter-evidence to the claim that the progressive is a stativizer in Hungarian.

5. On the aspectual properties of particle–verb complexes

In this section I take a broader look at the aspectual properties of particle–verb complexes. Let me start with a generalization concerning the relationship between proper Type 3 and Type 1 expressions: Whenever a proper Type 3 VP is acceptable (and then it is in the progressive aspect), then there exists a corresponding VP of Type 1 in which the same particle is in the preverbal position. For example, look at the following sentence:

(39) Réka ment be a könyvtárba
Réka go-past-3sg prt the library-into
'Réka was going into the library'

Putting the particle *be-* 'into' in front of the verb *ment* 'went' results in (40) which is an instance of Type 1.

(40) Réka be-ment a könyvtárba
Réka into-go-past-3sg the library-into
'Réka went into the library'

More precisely,

FACT 6

From proper Type 3 to Type 1

If a proper Type 3 VP is well-formed, then there is a corresponding Type 1 VP, but **not** vice versa.

Although in some of these cases we might talk about the "movement" of the particle to the front of the verb, there is nothing to move in those cases when the order of verb plus particle is not possible and still the order of particle plus verb is. For example, as we have seen earlier, in (41), the particle *meg* cannot appear after the verb in a neutral sentence to form a progressive VP:

(41) Írta a levelet
write-past-3sg the letter-acc
'(S)he was writing the letter'

(42) #Írta meg a levelet
write-past-3sg prt the letter-acc

However, putting *meg* in front of the verb is possible and makes a Type 1 VP:

(43) Meg-írta a levelet
prt-write-past-3sg the letter-acc
'(S)he has written/wrote the letter'

What explains Fact 6? A semantic explanation might go like this. The existence of the progressive interpretation signifies that the expression is an (atelic) process/dynamic state or a (telic) accomplishment. Atelic VPs belong to Type 2 (and, as we have seen, also to Type 3), while proper Type 3 contains accomplishments. Since postfixed VPs are all proper Type 3 expressions, a postfixed VP is an accomplishment in the progressive. Since all progressive accomplishments can, in principle, be accomplished, we predict the existence of a form that expresses the completion of the accomplishment in question.[5]

A simple compositional picture emerges on the basis of these facts if we assume that in Hungarian the progressive is more basic than the perfective (the latter being marked by filling out the preverbal position with the particle).[6] The meaning contribution and the aspectual contribution of the particle must be separated because they are orthogonal. The meaning contribution of the particle does not depend on the surface configuration of the sentence (i.e., whether progressive or perfect). For example, whatever the meaning that the particle *le* contributes to the following sentences is, it is the same in both cases:

(44) János éppen olvasta le a vízórát, amikor...
John just read-past-3sg prt the water-meter, when...
'John was reading off the water-meter when...'

[5] This line of thought, being semantic in nature, can be extended to all expressions of proper Type 3, like the one in sentence (27); however, as mentioned above, in this paper I am concentrating on VPs containing a particle.

[6] I am ignoring any other material that may appear in this position and concentrate on verbal particles exclusively.

(45) János le-olvasta a vízórát.
John prt-read-past-3sg the water-meter.
'John read off/has read off the water-meter.'

The difference is only aspectual.

The above example would be analyzed by most linguists as an instance of a non-compositional compound: *le* and *olvas* together make a meaning that is unpredictable on the basis of their "literal meanings". The point of this example is that the meaning of the verb plus particle complex is often unpredictable, so it should be taken semantically as one unit. However, the **position** of the particle has a well-defined aspectual contribution which can be summed up as follows: if it is in front of the verb, it makes the sentence perfective, while when it follows the verb, the sentence will be (proper) progressive.

These considerations prompt the question whether it is possible to predict on the basis of the meaning of the particle and the verb if the order of verb plus particle (i.e., the progressive interpretation) is possible. In some cases this is certainly possible. For example, when the verb expresses continuous spatial motion (e.g., *rohan* 'run') and the particle expresses a spatial direction (e.g., *ki* 'out'), the complex expression can be made progressive:

(46) János éppen rohant ki az állomásra, amikor...
John just run-past-3sg prt the station-to when...
'John was running to the railway station when...'

However, it seems that, apart from these cases, the chances of such a prediction are small, and the reason is hard to identify in full generality. For example, Kiefer (1991) makes the (tentative) hypothesis that the impossibility of certain morphosyntactically expressed progressives might be due to the fact that their particle**less** version already expresses the required progressive meaning (*op.cit.*, 265). This blocking hypothesis could explain why (47) is not well formed: simply because the sentence in (48) exists and expresses the required meaning.

(47) #János éppen olvasta el a *Háború és békét*
John just read-past-3sg prt the war and peace-acc
Intended meaning: 'John was reading *War and Peace*'

(48) János éppen olvasta a *Háború és békét*
John just read-past-3sg the war and peace-acc
'John was reading *War and Peace*'

However, this blocking strategy breaks down when it comes to explaining why (49) is fine.

(49) János éppen kente be a padlót viasszal
John just smear-past-3sg prt the floor-acc wax-with
'John was smearing the floor with wax'

Indeed, if we leave out the particle from the above sentence, the resulting sentence is perfectly acceptable and has a progressive meaning:

(50) János éppen kente a padlót viasszal
John just smear-past-3sg the floor-acc wax-with
'John was smearing the floor with wax'

One might object that the two progressive sentences are not completely synonymous, that is, (49) and (50) have slightly different meanings: (49) strongly suggests that John had the intention to cover the whole of the floor with wax, and this element is missing from (50). However, even if this is so, we cannot explain what forbids the insertion of *el* in (47) to express a similar intention on John's part to read the whole of the novel. Note also that claiming that *el* somehow, by force of its meaning, makes *olvasta a Háború és békét* perfective and this is why it cannot occur in the progressive sentence does not solve the problem either, because the meaning contribution of *be* in *be-kente a padlót viasszal* is similar or even identical to that of *el* in *el-olvasta a Háború és békét*. In fact, the contribution of the particles in both cases can be paraphrased as "intentionally continues to do the action until the whole of the object has been subjected to it".

6. Conclusion and further work

We have seen that the precise description of the language-dependent set-theoretical relations between sets of expressions compatible with well-chosen distributional tests can help in establishing such theoretical results as the progressive is not a stativizer in Hungarian. Therefore, it would be important to extend the scope of such empirical investigations to cover

a larger variety of expressions in Hungarian. On the purely theoretical side, investigations into the semantics of temporal adverbials used in such tests are also needed. Of course, these tasks are strongly interdependent, and should be carried out simultaneously.

References

Asher, Nicholas 1992. A default, truth conditional semantics for the progressive. In: Linguistics and Philosophy 15 : 469–508.

É. Kiss, Katalin 1987. Configurationality in Hungarian. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

É. Kiss, Katalin 1992. Az egyszerű mondat szerkezete [The structure of clauses]. In: Kiefer (1992b, 79–176).

É. Kiss, Katalin 1998. Mondattan [Syntax]. In: Katalin É. Kiss – Ferenc Kiefer – Péter Siptár: Új magyar nyelvtan [A new Hungarian grammar], 15–184. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest.

Kiefer, Ferenc 1982. The aspectual system of Hungarian. In: Ferenc Kiefer (ed.): Hungarian and general linguistics, 293–329. John Benjamins, Amsterdam & Philadelphia.

Kiefer, Ferenc 1991. A progresszív aspektus a magyarban [The progressive aspect in Hungarian]. In: Magyar Nyelv 87 : 257–77.

Kiefer, Ferenc 1992a. Az aspektus és a mondat szerkezete [Aspect and syntactic structure]. In: Kiefer (1992b, 797–886).

Kiefer, Ferenc (ed.) 1992b. Strukturális magyar nyelvtan 1. Mondattan [A structural grammar of Hungarian, Vol. 1: Syntax]. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Moens, Marc – Mark Steedman 1988. Temporal ontology and temporal reference. In: Computational Linguistics 14 : 15–29.

Piñón, Christopher 1995. Around the progressive in Hungarian. In: István Kenesei (ed.): Approaches to Hungarian 5 (Levels and structures), 153–90. JATEPress, Szeged.

Vlach, Frank 1981. The semantics of the progressive. In: Philip Tedeschi – Annie Zaenen (eds): Tense and aspect. Syntax and semantics 14, 271–292. Academic Press, New York.