

Summary in English

The thesis investigates Hungarian preverbs – also called verbal particles, verbal prefixes – and preverb constructions by a corpus-driven method. Its main research questions are as follows: (1) Which lexical items can be regarded as preverbs, and what are the grounds of their classification? (2) What kinds of clausal orders do preverb constructions show, when and to what extent can a preverb be separated from a finite/non-finite verb or a deverbal element? (3) How can we describe the productive preverb–verb patterns, and – based on this – what conclusions can be made about the semantics of preverbs?

As for the first question, I assume that there is a fuzzy boundary between preverbs and other bare nominal verb modifiers. The prototype-theory seems to be suited for the graded categorization needed here. With this in mind, I collect morphological and frequency-related features of preverbs, measuring the value of each feature in the case of 235 preverb-like lexical items. Considering the correlations of each feature-pair as well as the standpoints made in a range of relevant literature, I set up a continuum ranging from the standard preverbs to the least preverbish elements. Finally, I decide to split the continuum into four categories: prototypical, central, semi-peripheral and peripheral preverbs.

Regarding the second question, I first perform a synchronic corpus study, putting emphasis on the finite constructions. I show that in inverted order constructions (finite verb – preverb), the distance of the finite verb and its preverb can be influenced by phonological factors and by an ‘oral versus written’ distinction. I also examine the distribution of preverbs in the case of non-finite verbs and deverbal elements. Doing so, I present some constructions rarely discussed in linguistic literature. I also conduct a diachronic study which aims to quantify the changes of the prototypical preverbs’ positions, from the Old Hungarian period to the present day. This study shows a monotonous increase in the proportion of sentences containing a focused constituent. Moreover, it shows how the negative sentences having ‘verb – negative particle – preverb’ order make headway against the ones having ‘preverb – negative particle – verb’ order.

To answer the third question, I develop a method based on the corpus-driven study of ‘preverb – derivational suffix – argument frame’ triplets. I present the three most common ways of word formation in Hungarian: verb formation from nouns and verbs, and thirdly, verb formation using sound patterns. After that, I present the PREVCONS database containing 21 038 preverb–verb hapaxes. This resource makes it possible to explore the productive preverb–verb patterns by the accessibility of the triplets mentioned above. Finally, I present an experiment which aims to represent the different meanings associated with preverbs and the relationships between these meanings in a network-like structure based on PREVCONS, in the form of an ontology.

At the end of the thesis, I return to the concept which was my starting point, namely that the notion of preverb can be best captured by prototype-theoretical means. I check whether the original preverb continuum remains largely the same when considering distributional and semantic features of preverbs. The result shows that the two endpoints remain stable, while there is a considerable fluctuation in-between. The vagueness attested here leads to a viewpoint change from the study of lexical items to the study of constructions, largely based on László Kálmán’s review on the first version of this thesis. Beyond the introduction of this concept, a significant contribution of this short chapter is PREVDISTRO, an open-source database containing 41.5 million occurrences of 49 preverb construction types.