

## *Tanulmány*

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### **Contributions to the analysis of activity verbs and telicity marking in English and Hungarian**

#### **Abstract**

The aim of the paper is to give a brief analysis of activity verb predicates in English and to show various mechanisms of encoding telicity of these predicates in English and Hungarian. Two major mechanisms of encoding telicity in these languages are either marking an object as countable, i.e., a quantized object, or utilizing a specific particle (also recognized as “coverb” in Hungarian) on the verbal form. English predominantly uses the first mechanism, while Hungarian mostly utilizes the second. The class of activity predicates is the most ‘productive’ of all the event types revealed in the literature in the sense of accepting telicizing particles.

*Keywords:* telicity, particles, activity verb, quantized object, perfectivity

#### **1 Introduction**

Two major mechanisms of marking telicity have been identified in the literature (cf. Krifka 1998, Verkuyl 1972, 1993). One mechanism is to combine a non-stative (dynamic) verb with a quantized object. English uses this object-marking mechanism in (most) accomplishment and activity predicates. Dynamic verbs in combination with quantized arguments bring about a telic interpretation (cf. Verkuyl 1972). Verbal particles in English have also been claimed to play a role in the telicity of an event by indicating the endpoint of the activity,<sup>1</sup> though their contribution to the telicity value of a sentence is less systematic and consistent than that of the perfective particle in Hungarian. In Hungarian, the verbal particle or coverb (a preverbal element) has been considered as the grammatical marker of perfectivity, an element which inherently delimits an event (cf. Szili 1999). Two types of verbal particles contribute to the telic reading in Hungarian: i. resultative particles mark telic sentences describing an inherently delimited change of state, by denoting the resultant state of the individual undergoing the change; ii. terminative particles mark telic sentences describing an inherently delimited change of location, by denoting the end location of the moving individual (É. Kiss 2006: 18).

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<sup>1</sup> “The class of verb particles have the semantic property of imposing delimitedness on the event described by verb phrase or sentence” (cf. Tenny 1994: 148).

In this paper we will take a closer look at the ways in which verbal particles interact with the class of activity predicates in English and Hungarian and show how the telicity reading is brought about in both languages.

## 2 Activity verbs, particles and telicity marking in English

Activities are usually processes that involve physical or mental activity, and consist entirely in the process itself. Typical activities are *run, laugh, enjoy*, etc., but a more detailed classification of activity verbs will be presented below. Activities terminate or stop, but they do not finish: the notion of completion is irrelevant to a process event. Activities go on in time in a homogeneous way and according to Vendler (1967: 133) “any part of the process is of the same nature as the whole”. The present classification of activity verbs is based on Dowty (1979: 67), which is somewhat simplified by the author of this study in a way that the subcategorisation of verbs is made mainly on the basis of semantic properties of verbs with partial consideration of their syntactic properties. Such a simplification, however, does not affect our argumentation. Although activity verbs can be categorised in different ways, for the present research Dowty’s classification is suitable and seems to be well-grounded as it shows different kinds of verbs in each subclass, though Dowty himself notes that he does not intend to give “either exhaustive or mutually exclusive categories” and he does not “attach any theoretical significance to them” (Dowty 1979: 65). Thus the class of activity predicates includes the following subclasses:<sup>2</sup>

1. Volitional adjectives with individuals as subjects: *be brave, greedy, rude, nice, polite, obnoxious*.
2. Agentive activities involving some behaviour: *be a clown, hero, bastard, fool, stick-in-the mud*.
3. Activity of animate and inanimate subjects: *vibrate, rotate, hum, run, rumble, roll, squeak, roar*.
4. Cosmological: *thunder, rain, snow*.
5. Animate subjects: *cry, smile, go, walk, run, swim, talk, dance, ride*.
6. Transitive or ‘object deletion’ verbs: *smoke, eat, drink, play (music)*.
7. Verbs of movement with nominal predicates: *drive, carry, push NP*.
8. Transitive verbs with a nominal phrase: *sit, write, ride on NP*.
9. Non-extensional Object: *seek, listen for, look for, search for*.
10. Physical Perception Verbs (transitive and two-place phrasal):<sup>3</sup> *listen to, watch, taste, feel, smell*.
11. ‘Aspectual’ complement Verbs: *keep, continue*.

The activity verbs of the first two subclasses cannot be telicized by means of verbal particles. Perfectivity in the activity verbs of this subclass is achieved by the use of tenses. Consider the following sentences:

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<sup>2</sup> All the examples of activity verbs (predicates) in this section were compiled by the author of this study but were subject to native speakers’ judgements to avoid mistakes.

<sup>3</sup> By a ‘two-place phrasal’ Dowty (1979: 66) means a semantically essential noun phrase which follows a preposition.

- (1) a. *John is brave.*  
 b. *John was brave yesterday.*  
 c. *John has been brave since his childhood.*
- (2) a. *James is a hero.*  
 b. *James was a hero.*  
 c. *James has been a hero.*

Both (1a) and (2a) express habits in the simple form. Brinton (1988: 16) argues that the simple form is a marker of *perfective aspect* and similarly to the simple past which indicates a past perfective situation, that is, a situation seen as a completed whole, as in (1b) and (2b), the simple present indicates a present perfective. He further claims that states and habits are by necessity viewed perfectly since, states being non-dynamic are incompatible with the imperfective and habits are viewed perfectly since equivalent expressions in the imperfective express single ongoing situations (e.g. *John is walking to work*). In viewing such situations perfectly, the English speaker is not focussing on a particular instantiation of a habit, nor claiming that it is currently going on; rather he is viewing the situation as existing as a complete whole (Brinton 1988: 17). As far as (1c) and (2c) are concerned, Brinton (1988: 44) mentions that in the case of atelic verbs, owing to the “character of the main verb (but not the perfect!)”, there is “no implication of the action having reached any goal”.

The verbs of the third subclass cannot interact with particles that can telicize the event (telic verb-particle patterns are usually transitive). The verbs of this class are intransitive. As Capelle (2005: 45) points out telicity may be linked up with transitive verbs (even if these verbs may have intransitive uses) and atelicity may be linked with intransitive verbs.<sup>4</sup> Though it cannot be absolutely true, because exceptions like *drive a car*, *play a guitar*, *push the cart*, *sweep the floor*, etc. are all transitive but atelic. Still, it is obvious that a telic event should necessarily involve an undergoer argument, that is, an argument over which the speaker predicates the change of state coinciding with the endpoint of the event. Due to this implication, the sentence *The engine roared for an hour/all night long* sounds completely acceptable being atelic, whereas *\*The engine roared up in an hour* is odd and the event of roaring cannot be telicized by the particle. Similarly, we have an atelic reading of the verb *vibrate* in the sentence *The strings of the violin vibrated for a while* but one would not say *\*The strings of the violin vibrated down in a few minutes*. Though the sentence *The ball rolled down* is absolutely correct, here the perfectivizing factor is the direction, expressed by the directional particle *down*, and not by a truly aspectual particle. For these verbs, there is only one argument, realised as an inanimate subject.

A telic event requires the use of the direct object or an internal argument that can be realised as either an object or a non-agentive subject. Transitive verbs of creation (*make*, *write*) and verbs of consumption (*eat*, *drink*) have a common property: they have Incremental Theme objects (Dowty 1991: 587-92). These objects are affected by the event in a special way in that they “measure out” the progress of the event (Tenny 1994: 51). For example, *drive a car* or *eat an apple* (both atelic events) do not tell us much about the progress of the

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<sup>4</sup> It is often assumed that there are two kinds of intransitive verbs: inherently intransitive ones like *snore*, whose surface subject is also underlyingly a subject, and intransitive ones like *heal* in its intransitive use, whose subject is in fact claimed to be an underlying object. This hypothesis is known as the Unaccusativity Hypothesis (Perlmutter 1978: 157-89).

event, but in *push the cart to the store* there is an element which undergoes an explicit change of position and in this case a path delimits the event.<sup>5</sup> An atelic event does not involve an undergoer argument, since it does not include a definite endpoint. Following the discussion in Filip (2005: 92-109), we claim that activity verbs taking Incremental Themes (e.g. *write, read*) can turn into accomplishments by the addition of a quantized object (*write a letter/the letter/two letters*).<sup>6</sup> Stative verbs (*love, belong*), some activity verbs (of the class mentioned above) and achievement verbs (*recognize, reach*) do not take Incremental Themes. Consequently, their objects' quantization cannot change these predicates' telicity values (e.g. in the stative predicates *love fish* vs. *love the colour* no matter whether the object is quantized or not, the predicate is still stative and cannot delineate a process). These verbs can be considered as inherently (or lexically) atelic.

As Capelle (2005: 45) recapitulates, correspondence between (a)telicity and (in)transitivity should be kept in mind because it may provide a clue to the question of how particles play a role in argument realization. Since particles have been claimed to play a role in the (a)telicity of the event expressed by the verb phrase they occur in, it is not surprising that they also have an impact on the (non-)expression of verb arguments.

Similar to the verbs of subclass (3), 'cosmological' activity verbs of subclass (4) are also inherently intransitive, thus cannot be telicized by a quantized object and appear to be insensitive to the presence of particles.

Before analysing activity verbs of subclass (5), we should shed some light on the aspectual nature of directional particles. We feel it important to deal with the properties of directional particles, as markers of resultativity and hence perfectivity, in more detail. Capelle (2005: 362) distinguishes the following directional particles: i. those that are basically locative but that are interpreted as expressing a nonextended path in a motion construction: *apart, aside, away, back, in, out*; ii. those that express a path that may or may not be bounded: *by, down, up* 'to a higher position' (apart from these two classes, there are two other classes of directional particles which we do not examine in the present paper). Motion events involving particles of the first group are non-durative (using Vendler's terminology they are achievements). For example, an event like *run out* has no duration to speak of, and cannot combine with a durational adverbial phrase '*for X time*' (e.g. *\*I ran out for a few minutes*). Motion events involving particles of the second group can be either telic or atelic. Accordingly, they are compatible both with '*in X time*' and '*for X time*' temporal adverbials. Capelle (2005) underpins this fact with the following examples: referring to a mountain and its peak, one can say *I climbed up in five hours*; referring to the upward path itself, one can say *I climbed up for five hours (before I headed back or before the path sloped downward again)*. In the first case, the path is conceived of as end bounded by the peak, whereas in the second case, the path is not construed as having a definite end-boundary, i.e. the end-boundary is not within the focus

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<sup>5</sup> The broad notion of UNDERGOER (after Van Valin 1990) includes objects of verbs of creation/consumption like *eat*, as well as objects of verbs of translational motion like *push* and *drive* (Ramchand 2008: 11).

<sup>6</sup> In Krifka's (1998) sense a cumulative argument leads to a cumulative, thus atelic verbal predicate (e.g. *build some houses*); if a predicate is semantically quantized, it denotes an eventuality with an inherent temporal delimitation, i.e., it is telic. The example of the quantized predicate can be *a glass of water*; it is clear that a glass of water and another glass of water do not make a glass of water. Proper parts of a glass of water are not the same thing as a glass of water. Thus, *a glass of water* is a quantized predicate.

of attention, the situation is atelic. Thus, depending on the context verb particle constructions may be sometimes telic or atelic.

Perfectivizing aspectual particles of completion denote an endpoint or a goal of the event. According to the type of telicizing particle two types of telic situations can be distinguished: those describing a change of state and those describing a change of location.

Now let's turn back to the activity verbs of subclass (5), which include motion verbs like *go*, *walk*, *run*, *swim*, etc. and other activity verbs like *cry*, *smile*, *talk*, etc. The verbs of this group are intransitive, whose subject underlyingly is animate. While the perception verbs of this subclass can become perfective due to the purely aspectual particles, motion verbs can be telicized by the directional particles which contribute the notion of endpoint to the process. Hence, for instance, *cry out*, *smile up* and *talk up* become "perfective in the sense of attaining high intensity" (this meaning is emphasized by Bolinger 1971a: 99-100). Let us also analyse the following subset of examples involving motion verbs. We will use the 'in/for X time' test for expository purposes here.

- (3) a. *John went for hours/\*in an hour before he reached the first village.*  
 b. *John went in \*for a few minutes/within a few minutes without saying a word.*<sup>7</sup>
- (4) a. *Sylvia walked for hours/\*in an hour.*  
 b. *Sylvia walked up within a few minutes/\*for a few minutes and saw the mess in the attic.*  
 c. *During her long trip Sylvia walked up and down (the hill) aimlessly for hours/\*in an hour.*

As can be seen, the durative motion verb *go* in (3a) is converted into an achievement verb by the perfectivizing directional particle *in* in (3b), in this case the direction is the perfectivizing factor. The duration of motion is interrupted when the resultant change of location is achieved. In the second set of sentences, it appears that *up* may add both telic and atelic readings to the verb depending on the context, the durative motion verb *walk*, involving directional *up*, is compatible with both 'in X time' and 'for X time' adverbials thus yielding a telic reading in (4b) bringing about the change of location and an atelic reading in (4c), where a particle(s) that denote(s) a direction do(es) not specify the end-boundary, rather due to the use of particles, the sentence receives a reading which involves repetitions and backtracking.

From these examples, it is obvious that telicity is a complex notion. There are many factors to be taken into account when constructing the telicity of the verb (phrase). The most important is that the type of verb itself matters. Depending on the type of verb, i.e., an internal feature of the verb, which represents the intrinsic semantic properties of the verb and the properties of the object (if any) and the particle, a verb phrase can be interpreted as telic or atelic.

Dowty's subclasses (6) and (7) list absolute transitive verbs and transitive verbs of movement. Particles seem to be prone to combine with the verbs of these classes changing the

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<sup>7</sup> Notice that the phrase *for a few minutes* is used here as identical to the expression *spend a few minutes doing*, which is used to measure the duration of the motion event, but it may also denote the length of the resulting state, in which case the reading of the sentence *John went in for a few minutes* is acceptable. The adverbial *within a few minutes* is similar to the expression *in a few minutes*, but in the contexts of (3b) and (4b), this adverbial expression is more suitable (based on native speakers' judgements).

verb argument (the acceptability of the sentences below is based on native speakers' judgements besides the conventionalities of the language). Let us consider the following examples:

- (5) a. *John smoked a cigar for hours/the whole evening/in an hour.*  
 b. *John smoked up a cigar \*for hours/\*the whole evening/in an hour.*
- (6) a. *The police hunted the criminal for several days/in a couple of days.*  
 b. *The police hunted down the criminal \*for several days/in a couple of days.*
- (7) a. *Mary ate the soup for an hour/in an hour.*  
 b. *Mary ate up the soup \*for an hour/in an hour.*
- (8) a. *Julia packed the suitcase for an hour/in an hour.*  
 b. *Julia packed up the suitcase \*for an hour/in an hour.*
- (9) a. *The house burned for hours/\*in an hour.*  
 b. *The house burned down \*for an hour/in an hour.*
- (10) a. *John parsed the text for an hour/in two hours.*  
 b. *John parsed the text out in an hour/\*for an hour.*

In the subset of sentences (5) through (10), we can clearly see that the durative activity verbs in (a) are converted into accomplishments by the particles *up* and *down* in (b). These particles are used without the reference to upward or downward direction. Rather, the meaning of the particle *up* in the sentences above is 'completely'. The particle *down*, however, has a number of additional meanings besides the basic aspectual meaning of goal. Thus, while *down* in (6b) simply indicates that the goal of the action is attained, the action is completed, in (9b) the particle contributes to the destructive point of view, besides the endpoint (this meaning of the particle is emphasized by Live (1965: 436)). The examples (5a), (6a), (7a), (8a) and (10a) also show that the verbs used without a particle can have both telic and atelic readings, while in the corresponding (b) examples, when the particle is added the atelic reading disappears.

Apart from Filip (2005), Dowty (1979: 60, 1991: 571) also mentions that the transitive atelic verbs of subclass (7) such as *drive*, *carry*, *push* can be turned into perfective events by the Incremental Themes. We assume that the directional particles can equally perform this function and perfectivize the events. In fact, directional particles with these verbs serve the same telicizing function as the undergoer argument which brings about the change of state contributing to the endpoint of the event. For instance, the transitive atelic activity predicate *push the cart* can be telicized either by the addition of the argument *to the store* which undergoes an explicit change of position, in which case the path delimits the event (*push the cart to the store*),<sup>8</sup> or by any directional particle such as *out*, *in*, *up* or *down* as in *push the cart out*, where the direction telicizes the verb or verb predicates.

The next subclass of transitive verbs (subclass 8), also named "two-place phrasal verbs" often takes a prepositional phrase as a modifier, e.g. *ride on a horse* or *sit on a chair*, but the

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<sup>8</sup> Filip (2005: 99) refers to this as "the location of the moving entity on the structured path".

class also includes activity verbs which can be turned into accomplishments by Incremental Themes (e.g. *write a letter, read a book*) and by the addition of particles. In the following example we will examine the effect of the quantization properties of the object and the particle on the verb. Consider the following sentences:

- (11) a. *Sylvia wrote two pages of her essay in four hours/?for four hours.*<sup>9</sup>  
 b. *Sylvia wrote essay \*in four hours/for four hours.*  
 c. *Sylvia wrote down two pages of her essay in four hours/\*for four hours.*  
 d. *Sylvia wrote down essay \*in four hours/for four hours.*

As the above examples show, only the quantized object can turn the activity verb *write* into an accomplishment verb (11a), a mass or unspecified argument does not lead to telicity (11b). The telicity in (11c) is forced not only by the quantized object but by the aspectual particle *down* as well. However, if the object is unspecified, even the aspectual particle cannot convert an activity verb into an accomplishment (11d).

It is important to mention that the assumedly telic aspectual particles *up* and *down* do not telicize activity events in a couple of cases. Consider the following examples:

- (12) a. *John cleaned his room for a minute/in a minute.*  
 b. *John cleaned his room up a bit, before going out.*  
 c. *John cleaned his room up for ten minutes/in five minutes.*
- (13) a. *John wiped the table for a minute/in a minute.*  
 b. *John wiped the table down a little, before painting on it.*  
 c. *John wiped the table down for a minute/in a minute.*

As is seen from the examples above, while the activity verbs *clean his room* and *wipe the table* can have both telic and atelic readings as in (12a) and (13a), the activity verbs are modified not only by the particles *up* and *down*, but also by the degree adverbials such as *a bit* and *a little*, respectively in (12b) and (13b). Moreover, the verbs with *up* and *down* are compatible with both ‘for X time’ and ‘in X time’ adverbial phrases. Thus the use of degree adverbials and the ‘for X time’ test, which show atelicity, provide evidence against the telicizing function of the particles *up* and *down*. In these cases, both particles function as ‘zero-telic’ particles; as Capelle (2005: 4-6) remarks, particles denote a change of state with activity verbs, but this state may be gradable “to a higher or lesser degree” in some verbs. This gradation can be felt in the case of the particle *up* with the following semantic verb classes:

1. verbs of cooking (*cook, cut, chop, grind, slice, mash, mix, mush, scramble, shake, stir, etc.*)
2. verbs of heating (*fry, grill, heat, warm, etc.*)
3. verbs of cleaning (*clean, grease, polish, shine, wash, wipe, etc.*)
4. verbs of locking, fastening and repairing (*bandage, bind, close, glue, lock, tape, tie, wrap, fix, sew, weld, etc.*)

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<sup>9</sup> Note that *for X time* reading is possible with (11a) if the sentence refers to repetitions.

However, the particle *up* adds the meaning of ‘full consumption’ to consumption verbs (*drink, eat, smoke, use, guzzle, chomp, sip, etc.*), thus producing only a telic reading. Compare (the acceptability of the examples is underpinned by native speakers):

- (14) a. *Grill the lamb up a bit more before serving it.*  
 b. *\*Drink the beer up a bit more before the dinner.*

Similarly, the particle *down* may produce telic and atelic reading with verbs of cleaning (*brush down, clean down, dust down, hose down, slick down, sponge down, etc.*) and some activity verbs to which it adds the meaning of ‘the decrease in size and intensity’ (*scale NP down, play NP down, burn NP down, weigh NP down, slow (NP) down, tone NP down, etc.*). But, again as with *up*, *down* can have only a telic reading with verbs of consumption, denoting full consumption of something to be eaten or drunk (*drink down, gobble down, choke down, swallow down, etc.*) and verbs of writing and recording (*write NP down, copy NP down, draw NP down, jot NP down, mark NP down, etc.*). Again, in these cases when the particle contributes to ‘the gradable state’, it is zero-telic, and in the case of ‘non-gradable state’ it is purely telic. Consider:

- (15) a. *I need to slow down **a bit** after these exhausting months.* (gradable state)  
 b. *\*I wrote my ideas down **a bit** before going to bed.* (non-gradable state)

Activity predicates of subclasses (9), (10) and (11) cannot be telicized since being either stative verbs or ‘aspectual’ complement verbs they do not take telicizing particles.

The analysis above results in the following picture. It is clear that both the particle and the object of the verb are used to telicize events expressed by the activity verb. We have seen that the event is systematically interpreted as atelic when the argument is non-quantized, in these cases even the addition of the particle cannot reverse the situation. Directional particles, similar to truly aspectual particles, can telicize events denoted by motion verbs. However, the event can also have an atelic reading depending on the context. Finally, in the cases of verbs like *eat* and *drink*, often referred to as “consumption verbs” in the literature (cf. McIntyre 2004), the use of particle changes an atelic event into telic, the particle verb denotes an event that includes the inherent goal or endpoint of the total consumption of the thing to be eaten or drunk. In these cases the object has to be quantized as well.

The present analysis is based on the conventional usage of the language. It should be mentioned that there are (may be) many exceptions and deviations in terms of telicity expressed by a single verb, object quantization and the particle. The exceptions in the (a)telicity readings of the expressions are frequently attributed to a conversational implicature of the communities using the language.

### 3 Telicity marking in Hungarian

It is interesting to compare English and Hungarian for several reasons. English verb particle constructions are said to have parallels in the Hungarian language – verbal prefixation. Verbal particles (prefixes or preverbal elements, also known as coverbs) in Hungarian are thought to have the same effects (or at least very close similarity) on the VP as the particles in English.



However, while English typically signals telicity through functional morphology added to the object, Hungarian does the same adding a great number of perfective particles to the verbal root, besides quantizing the object. The issue of the relationship between telicity and perfective particles will be also discussed in this Section.

The compositional marking of telicity in Hungarian with a specific particle on the verbal form is more explicit than it is in English with a post-verbal particle. Hungarian verbal forms exist in imperfective and perfective forms, where the imperfective form is most often atelic (e.g. *levelet ír* ‘write a letter’, *süteményt eszik* ‘eat cake’), while the perfective form is normally telic (*megírja a levelet* ‘write the letter’, *megeszi a süteményt* ‘eat the cake’) (É. Kiss 1987, Szili 1999, Kiefer 1992, among others). As Szili (1999: 13) points out, in Hungarian the preverbal particle must be considered as the grammatical marker of perfectivity. The particle is the element which inherently delimits the event. There are a great number of perfective particles in Hungarian, each combining idiosyncratic lexical meaning(s) with the basic telicity meaning, as in *ír* ‘write, be writing’–*megír* ‘write’. Each verb selects for a number of particles, with subsequent changes in lexical meaning, cf. Szili’s (1996) examples (16c-j).

- (16) a. *ír* ‘write’  
 b. *megír* ‘write’  
 c. *kiír* ‘write out’  
 d. *átír* ‘write smth over, rewrite’  
 e. *felír* ‘prescribe’  
 f. *összeír* ‘draw up’  
 g. *leír* ‘write down’  
 h. *aláír* ‘sign’  
 i. *elír* ‘miswrite, misspell’  
 j. *beír* ‘write in’

In the above examples, the form in (16a) is the simplex, imperfective form. The addition of the particle *meg-* contributes an inherent endpoint to the event of writing and makes the verb perfective. In this example, we can classify *meg-* as a purely telic marker, without any additional idiosyncratic meaning, because all it adds to the verbal meaning is a potential endpoint. In (16c-j), however, we have the particles *ki-*, *át-*, *fel-*, *össze-*, *le-*, *alá-*, *el-*, *be-*, which add lexical meanings of their own to the verbal root meaning, besides signalling telicity. For instance, *fel-* and *alá-* change the verbal meaning from ‘write’ to ‘prescribe’ and ‘sign’, respectively, *ki-*, *be-*, and *össze-* add the meaning of finishing off something that had begun, while *el-* very often adds the meaning ‘to do something in a wrong way’ to the verbal stem. *Át-* is similar to the English prefix *re-*, as in *re-read*. In this sense, perfective prefixes can be viewed as derivational morphemes. What is important to emphasize here is that in the imperfective-perfective opposition it is not a simplex verb and a perfective particle verb, formed with the help of one of the particles above, that are in a close opposition, but the verbal phrases which are compatible with each other (Szili 1994: 140). Thus we have the following:

- (17) a. *vki olvas vmit* ‘smb reads, is reading smth’: *vki elolvas/kiolvas vmit* ‘smb finishes reading the book’

- b. *vki olvas vmit vkinek* ‘smb reads smth to smb’: *vki felolvas vmit vkinek* ‘smb reads smth aloud to another person’
- c. *vki olvas vmit vmiről* ‘smb reads smth about smth’: *vki leolvas vmit vmiről* ‘smb reads smth from smth’
- d. *vki újból olvas vmit* ‘smb reads smth again’: *vki átolvas vmit* ‘smb reads something through’

The arguments above are important, because in Hungarian, the distinguishing marker of perfectivity is delimitedness, i.e., the attainment of the endpoint denoted by the verb and the resultant change of state. The perfective particle verbs in Hungarian require an argument structure which consists of the highly transitive verb taking in the majority of cases definite article objects (Szili 2000: 365). Thus, the sentence is ungrammatical if a perfective particle verb is used without an object or the object is used without an article. Consider:

- (18) a. *Mari megfőzte az ebédet.*  
‘Mary cooked the dinner’.
- b. \**Mari megfőzte.*  
‘Mary cooked’.
- c. \**Mari megfőzte ebédet.*  
‘Mary cooked dinner’.
- d. \**Mari megfőzött egy ebédet.*  
‘Mary cooked one dinner’.

Taking the abovesaid into consideration, the following conclusion can be drawn. In Hungarian, the perfectivity (telicity) value of the VP depends on the presence of two important factors: (i) definite nominal argument, rarely indefinite nominal argument which serves to delimit the situation (this is parallel to the English object’s quantization); (ii) the perfectivizing particle contributing to the attainment of the new state.<sup>10</sup> But, as É. Kiss (2006) emphasizes, though adjective phrases or noun phrases have an important role in telicity marking in Hungarian, still the role of the verbal particle which adds little or no descriptive content in many cases is more important than that of the object.

Similar to English, in Hungarian there are also two types of telicizing particles: the particles that mark telicity on the verb describing an inherently delimited change of state, by denoting the resultant state of the individual undergoing the change (these are named as “resultative particles”, cf. É. Kiss 2006: 18), and those that mark telicity describing an inherently delimited change of location, by denoting the end location of the moving individual (cf. “terminative particles” É. Kiss 2006: 18). (There is also another class of particles in Hungarian, named as “locative particles” by É. Kiss, but as they are insensitive to the telicity marking of the verbs, they will be left out of discussion in the present paper).

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<sup>10</sup> The relationship between telicity and perfectivity is far from straightforward. It is especially evident in the Slavic languages, where it is not the case that all imperfective verbs are interpreted as atelic, neither it is the case that all perfective verbs are telic (cf. Borik 2002). Strictly speaking perfectivity cannot be completely equated with telicity. However, most perfective prefixes and telicity markers across the languages of the world have the same meaning: potential endpoint of the event. In this paper we will not make the distinction between the notions of telicity and perfectivity. Following É. Kiss (2006: 41), we claim that the verbs are telic because they describe an inherently delimited change, and they are perfective because they represent an event with its initial point and its endpoint included.

In the following, we will compare whether the particle verbs in Hungarian that mark telicity have corresponding particle verbs in English.

Similar to the examples in (16), in Hungarian we can find the following perfective pairs of the above mentioned activity verb *olvas* ‘read’:

- (19) a. *olvas* ‘smb reads’  
 b. *felolvas* ‘smb reads smth aloud’  
 c. *leolvas* ‘smb reads smth from somewhere’  
 d. *hozzáolvas* ‘smb reads in addition’  
 e. *átolvas* ‘smb reads smth through or again’  
 f. *beolvas* ‘smb reads smth into a microphone, announces smth’, idiom. ‘tells smb. off’  
 g. *kiolvas* ‘smb reads [a book] through’  
 h. *elolvas* ‘smb reads smth through/over’

In the examples above, we can see that the activity verb *read* can be turned into perfective by at least seven particles that mark telicity on the verb stem by describing delimited change of state. The activity of reading, for example, *a book* is completed in (19g) and (19h), here the verbal particles *ki-* and *el-* serve as purely telic markers, which add the notion of endpoint to the verbal root. It is obvious that these particles in the given examples are used not in the directional sense, which is discernible only with motion verbs or action verbs implying motion. In English, the corresponding particle of *ki-* and *el-* in the given context is *through* which has the same function in English as the Hungarian *ki-* and *el-*. In the examples (19b-f), the particles *fel-*, *le-*, *hozzá-*, *át-* and *be-*, add lexical meaning of their own to the verbal root, in addition to marking telicity. Thus, in *felolvas* we have the resultant state of smb’s reading something aloud, or in *leolvas* the telic change-of-state is attained by someone’s reading of something from somewhere, e.g. some appliance, as in *leolvasta a gázórát* ‘smb read the gas meter’. Similarly, *át-* and *be-* in e.g. *átolvasta a levelet* ‘(s)he read the letter over/again’ and *beolvasta a közleményt* ‘(s)he announced the statement’, also add the meaning of completion to the simplex verb, these particles refer to the resultant state of the process specified by the verb. None of the mentioned Hungarian particles such as *fel-*, *le-*, *hozzá-*, *át-*, *be-* have corresponding pairs among the English particles. In English, as seen above, the corresponding readings can be expressed only by a simplex verb in the past form followed either by a noun phrase or some adverb phrase. In many cases, even the basic verb form changes (e.g. *olvasta a híreket* ‘she **read** the news’– *beolvasta a híreket* ‘she **announced** the news’). Thus we can see that telicity marking by the Hungarian particles is clearer and more systematic than that by the English particles.

Let us examine another example of the activity verb *épít* ‘build’. The verb again can be perfectivized by at least seven particles:

- (20) a. *épít* ‘build’  
 b. *megépít* ‘build’  
 c. *felépít* ‘build’  
 d. *kiépít* ‘build up, extend’  
 e. *beépít* ‘build up/in’  
 f. *átépít* ‘rebuild, build smth over’

- g. *ráépít* ‘build smth on the top of smth’  
 h. *leépít* ‘lay smb off’ (usually of headcount)<sup>11</sup>

From these examples it can be seen that the verbal particles *meg-* and *fel-* are truly perfectivizing particles, which do not add any additional meaning except for an inherent endpoint to the event of building. These particles do not have corresponding counterparts in English, here the perfective event of building is expressed by a simple verb form. In fact, among seven perfectivizing particles in Hungarian, we can find only one instance in which the Hungarian particle would have a counterpart in English. This is the case of the Hungarian particle *be-* as in *beépít* and the corresponding *in* in English as in *build in*. In this case, however, there is a slight connection of the particle meaning to that of direction, therefore contrasting is possible. Again in (20d), the addition of the particle *ki-* to the verb, which has nothing to do with direction, changes the verbal meaning in English from *build* to *extend* and no corresponding particle is used in English. *Át-* is akin in function to the English prefix *re-* as seen in *rebuild*. In (20g), the verbal particle *rá-* adds a special lexical meaning ‘on the top of’ to the verbal root meaning, over and above telicity meaning. In English, only the simple verb followed by a noun object and a prepositional phrase can properly render the meaning of this Hungarian particle verb. Consequently, *ráépített egy emeletet a házra* can be rendered as *(s)he built/added another floor to the house*. And, finally, *le-* is idiomatic leading to a complete change of the basic meaning of the verb in English as in (20h).

#### 4 Conclusion

The analysis above shows that telicity marking by the perfectivizing particles in Hungarian is much clearer than that in English. Although the verbal predicate’s telicity value in English depends both on the presence or absence of a verbal particle and object quantization, the often restricted use of particles suggests that the power of telicity marking by a quantized object in English is stronger than that in Hungarian, where a verbal particle’s role is more dominant. The analysis has revealed that in those cases where telicizing particles occur with activity predicates, the particles bring about a change of state or a change of location of the event and convert the atelic activity verb predicates into telic accomplishments. As Bolinger (1971) points out, verb-particle constructions are almost invariably accomplishment verbs and the particle indicates unambiguously that an accomplishment is intended, focusing on the goal or endpoint of the event.

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<sup>11</sup> This verb is idiomatic, in this case the resultant particle *le-* is not lexicalised separately from the base verb *épít*.

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