How many letters are there? – Distributivity and the verbal particle

Kata Wohlmuth

In general, we can say that the presence of the verbal particle in the sentence in Hungarian has something to do with aspect; its role is to perfectivize and/or to telicize the eventuality described by the sentence (cf. Csirmaz 2006). But if we look at sentences containing a focus and a Definiteness Effect (DE-) verb (Szabolcsi 1986), we can clearly see that verbal particles have a different role too:

(1) KÉT DIÁKF írta a levelet.  
two students write.past the letter

(2) KÉT DIÁKF írta meg a levelet.  
two students write.past PRT the letter

These sentences can have the same aspectual value – terminative\(^2\) – in spite of the absence of the particle in (1)\(^3\). The main difference between (1) and (2) is that while in (1) the object can only refer to one entity, and so we have to consider the subject as a group \(\uparrow(a\sqcup b)\) (Landman 2000), in (2) the object is a bound variable (Kratzer 2009) and the subject has a distributive reading \(\{a,b\}\). In my proposed talk I want to explore the contribution of the verbal particle to the distributive reading in other environments as well.

References


---

1 University of Pécs; katawohl@gmail.com
2 Let me here use the term terminative for events both telic and perfective, and continuous for events atelic and imperfective.
3 (1) has a continuous reading as well, but here this is irrelevant.