

DIFFERENTIATION OF METAPHORICAL MEANINGS OF VERBS THAT ARE (ALSO) SYNONYMOUS IN THEIR LITERAL MEANINGS

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Abstract

This paper constitutes part of a larger research project and is devoted to studying a type of synonymy in which the relevant verbs are fairly close to one another not only in their literal meanings but in their metaphorical uses as well. In particular, the paper offers an analysis of the meanings of three Hungarian verbs, *szúr* 'pierce', *bök* 'poke', and *döf* 'stab'. The discussion is based on componential semantics within the so called organic-dialectal theory¹ of language (see, e.g., Zsilka 1981) that attributes a decisive role to meaning components in metaphorisation processes, too. It also builds on relevant fundamental insights of functional cognitive linguistics (see, e.g., Dancygier (ed.) 2017, Tolcsvai Nagy (ed.) 2017).

In the framework of this discussion, I seek answers to two interrelated questions: (i) Why do certain metaphorical meanings of the verbs *szúr*, *bök* and *döf* diverge from one another? (ii) How can the limits of their synonymy be established?

The meanings of the relevant verbs and the synonymy relationship(s) across them are detected with the help of the *Mazsola* search engine (Sass 2008) in data gleaned from the Hungarian Gigaword Corpus (HGC, see Oravecz et al. 2014). The paper surveys definitional aspects of the semantic system of the verbs *szúr*, *bök* and *döf*, and compares their meanings that are especially close to one another, those that are less close but still synonymous, and those that are not synonymous at all. Then, it will be explored what characteristic differences can be seen across metaphorical meanings of those verbs, how the traits (meaning components) that define them change over time, and whether there is any connection between the changes of those meaning components and the differences in meaning.

Keywords: synonymy, polysemy, metaphorisation, literal meaning, metaphorical meaning, verbs

1. Introduction

The study of synonymy, although it is a highly important phenomenon with respect to the organisation of semantic systems, has received comparatively little attention so far even within functional cognitive linguistics. Quantitative investigations in this area usually aim at the exploration of patterns of occurrence of certain expressions used synonymously (e.g., Glynn and Fischer (eds.) 2010, Glynn and Robinson (eds.) 2014, Glynn 2010, Divjak 2006), while qualitative studies try to reveal the conceptual relationships that are assumed to underlie those synonymy relationships (cf. Glynn 2014). It is, however, often not made explicit what factors may influence the nature of synonymy relationships and where the limits of synonymy are.

Similarly, little attention is devoted at present to interrelationships between polysemy and synonymy: despite the fact that the two phenomena are implicitly interconnected in a substantial set of analyses that try to describe polysemous meaning patterns, there are only a few studies on

¹ In Hungarian: *szerves-dialektikus nyelvelmélet*.

Hungarian that deal with this topic in detail, primarily in the framework of the organic-dialectical theory of language (e.g., Horváth 1996, 1998, Ladányi 1993).

In the present research project, I elucidate the assumption made above by presenting a concrete case study that reveals some aspects of the close connection that exists between verbal polysemy and verbal synonymy (for more detail see also Hrenek 2023). Here I deal with a type of verbal synonymy where verbs of a certain set of synonyms are close to one another in their literal meanings (as well as in many of their metaphorical meanings). By exploring the polysemous meaning patterns of three verbs (*bök* 'poke', *szúr* 'pierce', and *döf* 'stab'), and the way their synonymous meanings unfold, I try to answer two fundamental questions:

- (i) Do (or can) the interrelationships of the literal meanings of the verbs concerned influence the patterns of synonymy relationships of their metaphorical meanings, and if they do (or can), how?
- (ii) How can we account for the limits of synonymy in these cases?

I assume that the pattern of synonymy relationships is determined by the fact that originally similar meaning components in the polysemous semantic patterns of the given verbs may change or be modified in diverse directions due to diverging processes of metaphorisation.

The paper is organised as follows: After discussing the conceptional framework (Section 2) and methodological background (Section 3) of this research, I will survey the traits that define the literal meanings of *szúr*, *bök* and *döf* (Section 4.1) and compare the metaphorical meanings of those verbs that are especially close to one another, those that are less close but still synonymous, and those that are not synonymous at all (Section 4.2). The paper concludes with a summary of the results and by highlighting some issues for future research (Section 5).

2. Conceptional framework

2.1. Theoretical background

In this paper I take the organic-dialectical theory of language² as a point of departure, given that this approach makes a detailed description of the meanings and semantic relationships of various linguistic items possible, and it also provides a theoretical and methodological basis for accounting for varied types of dynamic processes and mutual influences across the meanings of various verbs not only within polysemous semantic patterns of the individual verbs but also across meanings of sets of synonymous verbs. Furthermore, it yields an overall conceptional framework for the description and interpretation of complex correlations of both verbal polysemy and verbal synonymy.

However, in the original version of the organic-dialectical theory of language, certain issues with respect to the description of semantic phenomena do not arise (or come up merely tangentially, as implicit presuppositions). Such issues include perspectivisation and linguistic construal, and, in this regard, theoretical and methodological background issues of the collection, processing, and interpretation of corpus data can also be mentioned. In studying these aspects of verbal meanings and semantic relationships, I have taken the premises of functional cognitive linguistics³ as a point of departure, and I attempted to synthesise, in a way, these two approaches that are related to some extent but come to largely different conclusions in some cases.

Accepting the standpoint of functional cognitive linguistics, I interpret language as a phenomenon that cannot be separated from its social and cultural context or the human way of thinking and that cannot be investigated irrespective of these aspects or without taking these factors into consideration (see, e.g., Langacker 1987, Taylor 2002, Sinha 1999). On the other hand, I subscribe to

² For a summary, cf. e.g. Zsilka 1973a, b, 1975, 1981, Ladányi 1997, 1998, Kállay 2016, NyMDK. 1–11; Hrenek 2019.

³ For various summaries, cf. e.g. Ladányi and Tolcsvai Nagy 2008, Geeraerts and Cuyckens (eds.) 2007, Dąbrowska and Divjak (eds.) 2015, Dancygier (ed.) 2017, Tolcsvai Nagy (ed.) 2017, Xu and Taylor (eds.) 2021.

the basic tenet of the organic-dialectical theory of language that the aim of linguistic analysis is to explore and interpret some primarily linguistic insights that emerge from the concrete language material at hand (see, e.g., Zsilka 1981). In my analysis, I endeavour to do exactly that, as well as to study linguistic construal, which plays a key role in functional cognitive linguistics and crucially depends on speakers' perspectives (see, e.g., Verschueren 1999, Tátrai 2017). Accordingly, I have also modified or modulated the theoretical and methodological points of departure of the organic-dialectical theory of language to some extent, based on the conclusions that emerged from the linguistic material that I processed during my analyses (cf. Section 2.2).

The description of meanings is inseparable from the contexts of use of the linguistic units concerned, as well as from the ways speakers perceive and make sense of the aspects of reality that the expressions are currently used to refer to (more precisely, that the speakers currently make those expressions refer to), and how (i.e., focusing on which factors or characteristics) they interpret them. Accordingly, and in that sense, in the analyses that follow it is an important question from what perspective a speaker construes or presents a given situation when using the verbs concerned, and which real or assumed characteristics of that situation they enhance in doing so. I also tried to take the larger context of the occurrences of those verbs into consideration, given that it can modify or narrow down the interpretation of their meanings, and can contribute to making clear what (contextual and/or semantic) factors may have motivated the use of the given linguistic item in a particular utterance (cf., e.g., Verschueren 1995, 1999, Tátrai 2017, 2021).⁴

2.2. The description of semantic patterns of polysemous verbs: meaning variants, meanings, and meaning types

In accordance with the framework of the organic-dialectical theory of language, I interpret meaning in this paper primarily as a phenomenon of a linguistic kind, one that is, however, embedded in a situation, emerges during dynamic processes of meaning attribution bound to interactions, and changes in its concrete uses in discourses, as the basic tenets of functional cognitive linguistics claim (see, e.g., Verschueren 1999, Tátrai 2017).

The organic-dialectical theory of language emphasises the extraordinarily dynamic nature of the processes of semantic change (or those of metaphorisation in a broad sense), and takes the mutual effects that meanings keep making on one another to be of fundamental importance for the way language works. It claims that the various meanings of a linguistic unit are closely interrelated, continually change, keep reinterpreting, modulating, and construing each other, thus cooperatively producing and reproducing the system of meanings of the given linguistic unit over and over again. The meanings of polysemous verbs, and the system of those meanings, can be described in this approach as a complex system of general and specific meaning components that take shape and change during their use and recognition.

On the other hand, the results of my previous studies showed that in accounting for the semantic characteristics of verbal meaning patterns it is worthwhile to operate with three different notions of meaning, introducing the triple classification of meaning variants, meanings (proper), and meaning types (cf. Hrenek 2023a, b). By using these concepts, we can describe the semantic patterns of the verbs under investigation at three distinct levels of generality.

Meaning variants of a verb are semantic units directly showing up in actual use, in concrete linguistic utterances that can be characterised as special combinations of general and specific semantic components and that are also affected by the meanings of the arguments occurring in the given verb phrases as concrete lexical items. (On mutual semantic influences between verbs and their arguments see, e.g., Zsilka 1982: 73–132, Langacker 2009.) Hence, meaning variants occur e.g. in the examples in (1)–(3) (as well as in all other examples cited in this paper):

⁴ Since, however, I built my analyses mostly on the investigation of corpus data, the extralinguistic environments of those utterances were impossible for me to ascertain. I could only (indirectly) include contextual factors and their effects in the description to the extent that the texts explicitly or implicitly referred to them.

- (1) Anszur bólintott, kézbe fogta a golyót, elhajította. A tiszt arca földerült. Ahol a golyó leesett, földbe **szúrtak** egy ágdarabot. (#25263442)⁵
 'Ansur nodded, took the ball in his hand, and threw it away. The officer's face lit up. Where the ball fell on the ground, a piece of bough was **thrusted** into the earth.'

föld-be **szúr-t-ak** egy ágdarab-ot
 earth.SG-ILL⁶ thrust-PST-3PL a bough.piece.SG-ACC

- (2) a fésűkölteményt dús kontya tekervényeibe **szúrta** (#13915880)
 'she **inserted** that poem of a comb into the wreath of her rich chignon'

a fésűköltemény-t kontya-a tekervény-ei-be **szúr-t-a**
 the comb.poem.SG-ACC chignon-POSS.3SG.GEN^{7,8} coil-POSS.PL-ILL⁹ insert-PST-3SG.DEF¹⁰

- (3) Visszahúzódott a fal mellé, s a bicskáját tétován a téglák réseibe **szúrta**. (#5408295)
 'He withdrew to the wall and **stabbed** his jack-knife hesitantly into the gaps of the brick wall.'

bicská-já-t a téglá-k rés-ei-be¹¹ **szúr-t-a**
 penknife-POSS.3SG-ACC the brick-PL.GEN gap-POSS.PL-ILL stab-PST-3SG.DEF

In the examples in (1)–(3), we see variants of the same metaphorical meaning of the verb *szúr* with the same syntactic pattern¹² (N₁ *szúr* N₂-t N₃-ba¹³ [N₁-NOM *szúr* N₂-ACC N₃-ILL]) and with the same general verbal content '(somebody) makes (something) get into (something)'. In meaning variants that can be classified under the same meaning, verbs cooccur with nouns belonging to the same or nearly the same semantic groups (e.g., N₁ 'person', N₂ 'pointed object (like a pin)', N₃ 'a gap or a substance-type medium (or one perceived as such)'). Specific meaning components that are relevant in the given utterances may also be shared by the variants; in the examples (1)–(3) above,

⁵ All examples in this paper come from the Hungarian Gigaword Corpus v2.0.5 (see Section 3); the text samples are cited without change, keeping the original spelling. The translations of the examples are followed, in parentheses, by the identification number that the cited sample carries in the corpus. In the case of longer samples, I only gloss the verb and its arguments, while the translation of the cited text sample is given in full.

⁶ In Hungarian, the singular form of nouns do not have an overt suffix. However, in the glosses, I specify that the noun is in singular.

⁷ In Hungarian, the suffix with a genitive function is not morphologically independent. In certain cases, it coincides with the nominative (lacking an overt suffix, as illustrated in example (2)). In other instances, it shows synchronism with the dative suffix *-nak* (see e.g. Ladányi 2017: 589–592). Thus, for example, expression *kontya tekervény-ei-be* (chignon-POSS.3SG.GEN coil-POSS.PL-ILL) is considered equivalent to *kontya-nak a tekervény-ei-be* (chignon-POSS.3SG-GEN coil-POSS.PL-ILL) variant.

⁸ The number and person of the possessor, similar to verbs, are indicated on the nouns by a single suffix. In glosses, this possessive number/person is represented by attaching it to POSS with a dot. For instance, POSS.3SG corresponds to a single suffix.

⁹ The POSS.PL marking in this instance pertains to the plurality of the possession. References to a singular third-person possessor (e.g., *kontya* 'chignon' (2)) or a plural third-person possessor (e.g., *téglák* 'bricks' (3)) do not exhibit an overt suffix (cf. Rácz 1974: 145–148); therefore, these are not annotated in the glosses.

¹⁰ In Hungarian, two types of verb conjugations can be distinguished: definite and indefinite. In the glosses, only the suffixes of the definite conjugation are marked (DEF).

¹¹ *A téglá-k rés-ei-be ~ a téglá-k-nak a rés-ei-be* (cf. footnote 7.).
 the brick-PL.GEN gap-POSS.PL-ILL the brick-PL-GEN the gap-POSS.PL-ILL

¹² Hungarian verbs are affixed for the number and person of the entity that carries out the action, hence the subject (N₁) does not always occur explicitly in the sentence. The subjects of examples (1)–(3) are not overt, for instance.

¹³ The item *-ba* – here and throughout – is a generalised exponent of the illative case marker, covering both its harmonic variants *-ba* and *-be*, while *-ra* refers to the variants *-ra* and *-re* of the sublative marker.

such components are 'penetratingly', 'relatively deeply', 'instantaneously' and 'instrument: (pin-like) pointed object'.¹⁴ On the other hand, meaning variants can differ from one another in one or several meaning component(s) that is/are not decisive in the current context but not negligible either. For instance, 'pointed contact' may be relevant in the verbal meaning in some of the cases (as in (1) and (3)) but not in others (as in (2)).

In addition, differences across meaning variants can also be caused by the fact that a meaning component may be interpreted in partly different ways (that is, as distinct component variants) in diverse contexts. Indeed, certain meaning components may occasionally also have variants that interpret the same phenomenon (or the same aspect of a phenomenon) in similar ways but from a different point of view, standing for a different speaker's perspective. For instance, in certain contexts or in certain textual environments the component 'suddenly' of the literal meaning of *dőf* can rather be specified as 'unexpectedly', thus foregrounding the viewpoint of the perceiver, see Section 4.2. Unlike semantic units that will be characterised as independent meaning components in the analyses that follow, component variants are typically not based on one another in a hierarchical manner but rather seize some peculiarity of the scene being described from different angles, emphasising different aspects of it.

In this approach, the individual **meanings** of a verb are somewhat abstract semantic units based on the meaning variants as defined above and bound up with constructional schemas which – just like in the case of meaning variants – are interpreted as specific combinations of meaning components attached to given verb phrases. They cannot be understood independently of the various semantic groups of arguments, or more generally, of the nominal expressions occurring in the environment of the verb (cf., e.g., Simon 2016, 2018; with respect to how diverse argument structures give important cues for differentiating among verb meanings in practical lexicographic work, see e.g. Elekfi 1966: 194–214, H. Molnár 1969: 229–269, Ittész 2011: 86–93). Meanings, defined in this manner, are schematised from meaning variants,¹⁵ hence meaning variants can be taken to be concrete implementations of meanings as schemas. The relationship between meanings and meaning variants can be understood, in this interpretation, as a mutual dynamic relationship between schemas and implementations (cf., e.g., Langacker 1987, Taylor 2002).

Accordingly, the shared general components of verbal meaning variants potentially summarised in a scheme (meaning) can be described as collectively making up verbal meaning (sticking with examples (1)–(3), '(somebody) makes (something) get into (something)'); the shared specific meaning components (in these examples) are 'penetratingly', 'relatively deeply' and 'instrument: (pin-like) pointed object', while the somewhat schematic semantic groups of the verbal arguments (N₁-NOM, N₂-ACC, N₃-ILL) are (N₁ 'person', N₂ 'pointed object (like a pin)', N₃ 'a gap or a substance-type medium'). In sum, the metaphorical meaning of the verb *szúr*, schematised from the meaning variants shown in examples (1)–(3), bound to the syntactic structure of the construction N₁ *szúr* N₂-t N₃-ba [N₁-NOM *szúr* N₂-ACC N₃-ILL], can be captured with a relatively low degree of generality as follows: 'a person (N₁) makes a (pin-like) pointed object (N₂) enter (V) a gap or a substance-like medium (N₃)', where the meaning also includes the features of entering: 'relatively deeply penetrating' and 'momentarily'.

The **meaning types** of a verb (unlike its meaning variants and meanings) are not independent semantic units but rather clusters of verbal meanings that are held together by a more general and, consequently, more schematic verbal meaning component. That is, meaning types can be defined as groups of meanings systematised by general verbal meaning components. For instance, in the

¹⁴ Reference to the instrument of the action as a semantic component is usually marked by an accusative argument in the argument frame of the verb, except if the verb phrase refers to a process of producing something: in that case, the noun referring to the entity produced is in the accusative and the one specifying the instrument is in the instrumental case.

¹⁵ The categories of meaning variants and meanings as sketched here can be seen as partially parallel with 'contextual meanings' and 'type meanings', respectively (cf., e.g., Tolcsvai Nagy 2015: 51–52), but the two pairs of concepts cannot be totally identified with each other since they are interpreted within two different terminological systems.

meaning pattern of *szúr*, meaning types can be staked out (among other combinations) by the general components '(somebody/something) makes (something) get (somewhere): cause something to get somewhere', '(somebody/something) produces (something): cause something to emerge', and '(something) causes (physical) pain or inconvenience' (cf. Section 4.2):

(A) '(sy/sg) makes (sg) get (swhere): cause to get somewhere'

Here we can mention examples (1)–(3), and also those in (4)–(6) where the meaning variants that occur can be understood as implementations of distinct (literal or metaphorical) meanings of *szúr*. But the general verbal component 'cause to get [something somewhere]' organises all those meanings into a single meaning type:

- (4) Akadnak olyanok is, akik moha helyett egy polisztiéndarabba **szúrják** a virágokat és a gallyakat. (#236521482)

'There are some [florists] who **stick** flowers and twigs into polystyrene blocks, rather than into bunches of moss.'

egy polisztién-darab-ba **szúr-ják** a virág-ok-at és a gally-ak-at
one polystyrene-piece.SG-ILL stick.PRS-3PL.DEF¹⁶ the flower-PL-ACC and the twig-PL-ACC

- (5) Az egész határ, libaőrzéseim vidéke tele volt az én csalafinta jeleimmel (libatollat **szúrtam** a közeli zombékba, kákára csomót kötöttem stb.) (#1058753)

'The whole countryside, the meadow where I herded geese, was full of signs of my craftiness (I **stuck** a goose feather into the nearby tussocks, I tied a knot on the reeds, etc.)'

liba-toll-at **szúr-t-am** a zombék-ba
goose-feather.SG-ACC stick-PST-1SG the tussock.SG-ILL

- (6) rövid ujjú ingben emelgette-vizsgálta a zsongó méhecskével teli kereteket; ha a vadabbja közül karjába **szúrta** valamelyik a fullánkját, nem zavartatta magát, nem ártott a méreg, a csípést meg tán észre sem vette (#1166199)

'he kept lifting and studying the frames full of buzzing bees in a short-sleeved shirt; if one of the more savage ones **stabbed** its sting into his arm, he was not troubled, the poison did not harm him, he didn't even notice the sting'

valamelyik [méhecske] a kar-já-ba **szúr-t-a** a fullánk-ját
some [bee].SG.NOM¹⁷ the arm-POSS.3SG-ILL stab-PST-3SG.DEF the sting-POSS.3SG-ACC

(B) '(sy/sg) creates (sg): cause to emerge'

To illustrate the second meaning type within the meaning pattern of *szúr* we can bring up examples in which the meaning of the verb can be described with respect to the general verbal content 'produce (something)'. The emergence of that component and its position within the meaning pattern of *szúr* can be understood if we take it into consideration that whenever a person drives a pointed, pin-like object into a substance-like medium, a hole emerges as a consequence of that action in the surface of the material that was unscathed beforehand; a hole that can be seen as an injury or even as a pattern – that is, in the process of piercing something in the concrete physical sense the component of getting something somewhere and that of creating something are closely interlinked. However, in the examples of the **(B)** meaning type (as opposed to those in the **(A)** meaning type), the verb does not primarily refer to the spatial movement of a pin-like object; linguistic

¹⁶ In Hungarian, the present tense does not have an overt suffix.

¹⁷ In Hungarian, the nominative (NOM) function is not marked by any overt affix; it is marked by the opposition with the other forms of the nominal inflectional paradigm (all of which exhibit overt suffixes).

interpretation rather foregrounds in this case the fact that during the process, as its consequence, a new entity is created. (In the case of (7), this is closely linked to the piercing process in a physical sense, whereas in (8), it is interpreted in a more abstract manner, and does not imply a concrete action.) For instance:

- (7) A fenyőfára dísznek szánt mézeskalácsokat ba [sic!] hurkapálcikával egy lyukat **szúruk**, hogy később át tudjuk rajta fűzni a cérnát. (#726989313)

'We **bore** (holes into) the gingerbread figures meant to adorn the Christmas tree with a skewer, so that we can later slip the thread through them'

a mézes-kalács-ok-ba	egy lyuk-at	szúr-unk
the ginger-bread [figure]-PL-ILL	one hole.SG-ACC	bore.PRS-1PL

- (8) A nők akkortájt igen rövid szoknyát viseltek. Meztelen lábszárára apró piros pontokat **szúrt** a hideg. (#16841015)

'Women wore very short skirts those days. Coldness **stabbed** small red spots on her naked legs.'

lábszár-á-ra	pont-ok-at	szúr-t ¹⁸	a hideg
leg-POSS.3SG-SUB	spot-PL-ACC	stab-PST.3SG	the coldness.SG.NOM

(C) '(sg) causes (physical) pain or inconvenience'

The third meaning type to be mentioned here is also closely related to the (A) meaning type as causing physical pain or inconvenience is also a kind of "accompaniment" or consequence of the piercing process in the physical sense. However, at the level of metaphorical meanings, just like in the case of the component of creating, the component 'cause (physical) pain or inconvenience' may also get severed from the actual piercing event and may direct the listener's attention towards the painful or inconvenient nature of percepts, effects, or impressions (as interpreted by the speaker). Such cases are instantiated in the text samples in (9)–(11):

- (9) Kék és vörös kockákból volt szőve, de úgy rátapadt a testére, hogy sírni szeretett volna, zokogni, annyira **szúrt** a pulóver (#12909711)

'It was woven out of blue and red squares, but it stuck to her body so tight that she felt like crying and blubbing, so hard the pullover **was stinging** her'

szúr-t	a pulóver
sting-PST.3SG	the pullover.SG.NOM

- (10) Olyan hó, mint a tű. Az embert szinte csípte, **szúrta**, ahogy nekicsapta a szél a bőrének (#47676546)

'Snow was like needles. One **was** almost stung, **bitten**, as the wind threw it to one's skin'

a hó	szúr-t-a	az ember-t
the snow.SG.NOM	bite-PST-3SG.DEF	the man.SG-ACC ¹⁹

- (11) Várpalotán záptojásszag **szúrta** az orromat, a szénfeldolgozóból. (#4335697)

'In the town of Várpalota, rotten egg smell **was pricking** my nostrils, from the coal works.'

záptojás-szag	szúr-t-a	az orr-om-at
rottenegg-smell.SG.NOM	prick-PST-3SG.DEF	the nostril-POSS.1SG-ACC

¹⁸ Despite the fact that in the third person singular of indefinite conjugation there is no overt suffix, this function is also indicated in the glosses.

¹⁹ In Hungarian, *az ember* 'the man' can be equivalent to the English *one* (i.e. 'somebody').

Reviewing the meaning types **(A)–(C)**, we can say that meaning types can occasionally lump meanings together that are apparently relatively far from one another if the given meanings can be captured by taking the same general verbal meaning components into consideration, even if they are interpreted in distinct systems of interdependences. (The general verbal meaning components defining meaning types may also play an important role in the unfolding of synonymy relationships, as will be discussed in detail in Section 4 below where I summarise the results of some concrete analyses.)

The hierarchy of meaning variants, meanings and meaning types is (very schematically) depicted in Figure 1 below:

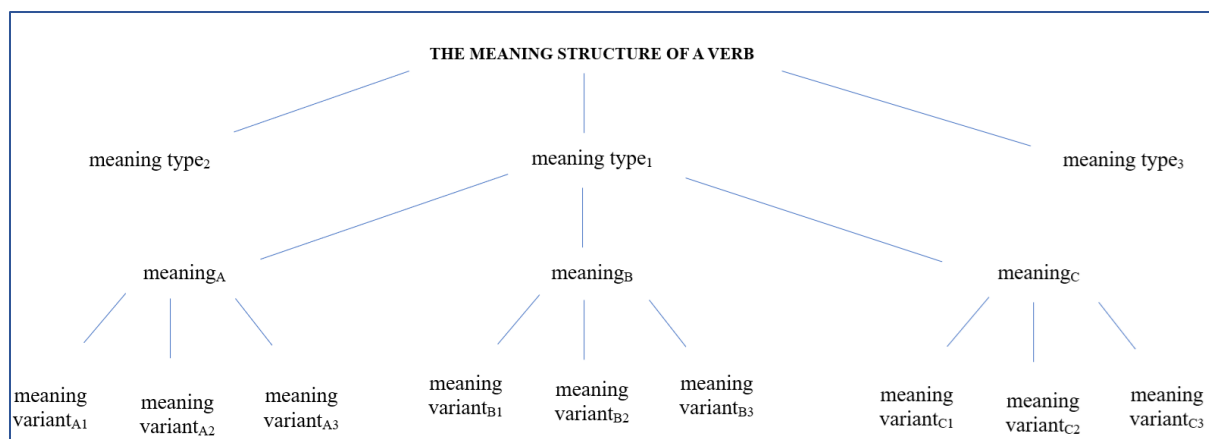


Figure 1. Meaning variants, meanings, and meaning types in the meaning structure of verbs

2.3. The interpretation of synonymy relationships

The relation of synonymy is usually defined in the literature as similarity (or sometimes: identity) of meaning and style across various linguistic units (cf., e.g., Cruse 1986, Lyons 1995; see also da Silva 2015). On the other hand, there is no consensus (and no uniform system of criteria) on what degree of similarity is required to speak of synonymy and how, in what concrete ways, such similarity can be pinned down and examined. The case study presented in this paper is meant to contribute to the clarification of these issues by way of an analysis of meaning relationships within a relatively narrow range of verbal synonyms.

Synonymy is defined here as similarity across certain meanings of different linguistic units that is (arguably) based on shared meaning components (see Ladányi 1993), and is closely related to the concept of interchangeability, even though the two properties cannot be equated unproblematically. It is also worth pointing out that synonymy does not mean an absolute synonymy (that is, total identity of meaning and style) in most cases, but it can rather be seen as an interplay of similarities and differences (cf., e.g., Murphy 2003). In addition, its description and interpretation must involve tightly interlocked semantic, stylistic and syntactic criteria.

In the conceptual framework sketched here, in harmony with insights hinted at above, ranges of synonyms can be captured as dynamically changing arrangements in constant interaction with the items involved in them, rather than *ab ovo* given, unchangeable groupings that are easy to circumscribe. Linguistic units that become synonymous in some of their meanings via diverse processes of semantic change (see, e.g., Ladányi 1993, Horváth 1996) do not simply join a given range of synonyms but they also affect the range of synonyms that they become members of: they often modify or reinterpret those meaning components or arrangements of meaning components that keep the given range of synonyms together and thereby define it.

3. Method and material

The research reported here is corpus-based (cf. Tognini-Bonelli 2001), using corpus data primarily taken from the Hungarian Gigaword Corpus (HGC v2.0.5, see Oravecz et al. 2014). Some of the data, however, were not gleaned using the search interface of HGC itself but via the *Mazsola* search engine (cf. Sass 2008) that had been produced with the aim of examining verbal argument frames based on the material of an earlier version of HGC. The advantage of this is that *Mazsola* systematises hits in terms of the individual verbal arguments, thus facilitating the description of polysemous patterns of verbal meanings. In fact, I assume a close correspondence between the meanings of verbs and those of their arguments, and I also assume that by sketching the semantic groups of arguments we can come closer to an adequate exploration of verbal meanings, too (see Section 2.2).

I thoroughly processed a 1500-item sample from HGC for each verb concerned. By doing so, I was able to take the larger context of the verbs into consideration, as made possible by the characteristics of the corpus. In searches executed with the help of *Mazsola*, however, I also incorporated a larger material in my research: for each of the verbs under study, I analysed their occurrences in verb + accusative noun (V + N-t) constructions, given that all three verbs are transitive in most of their meanings, and I searched three further argument frames that the relevant entries of the available large Hungarian monolingual dictionaries (*A Defining Dictionary of Hungarian*, ÉrtSz., *A Comprehensive Dictionary of Hungarian*, Nszt.) claim are typical argument frames for those verbs. I did not narrow down the hit lists in any way, thus I did not exclude cases in which the argument frame of a hit was larger than the ones given above. For example, hits returned for the argument frame *szúr* N-t [N-ACC] could include, among other options, expressions like *szúr* N-t N-bA or N-rA [*szúr* N-ACC N-ILL/N-SUB], etc. The aim of those searches was simply to enable the hits to range over the largest possible set of occurrences (uses) of those verbs, arranging the hits according to the arguments given in the search terms. Obviously, this resulted in some overlap between the various argument frames employed.

The quantity and distribution of the data gleaned with the help of *Mazsola* is summarised in Table 1:²⁰

	V + N-t	V + N-rA	V + N-bA	V + N-(V)n ²¹	Total
<i>bök</i>	185	192	52	24	453
<i>szúr</i>	1338	109	495	279	8221
<i>döf</i>	258	7	16	40	321

Table 1. The occurrences of *bök*, *szúr* and *döf* in various argument frames (*Mazsola*)

Even though the analyses are strictly based on text corpora, that is, on expressions coming from real language use, I also relied to some extent on the material of certain Hungarian monolingual dictionaries.²² I did not take dictionary entries as primary data for my research in a strict sense, and I did not analyse them in any way. However, I do consider the Hungarian monolingual defining dictionaries that are available to represent an extremely rich material that had been compiled consciously and reflexively. They reflect the professional intuitions of generations of dictionary makers and may thus confirm or modulate the conclusions drawn from the analysis of corpus data as well as point out

²⁰ The table does not include nominative arguments, since they were not part of any of the searches. The rest of the arguments (as search conditions) will not be enumerated here, since they can occur by themselves and combined in various ways in the individual argument frames.

²¹ The label -(V)n generalises over the allomorphs of the superessive suffix -n/-on/-en/-ön, where V stands for the variably present vowel in a general form.

²² These are the following: *A magyar nyelv értelmező szótára* (ÉrtSz.), *Magyar értelmező kéziszótár*^{1,2} (ÉKsz.¹, ÉKsz.²), *A magyar nyelv nagyszótára* (Nszt.); *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára* (TESz.), *Új magyar etimológiai szótár* (UESz).

meanings that are not necessarily represented in corpora covering the synchronic state of the language but might shed light on important semantic facts relevant in synchrony, too.

In describing the semantic characteristics of verbs, both within their polysemous patterns and across their synonymy relationships, I took the methods of componential semantic analysis²³ as a point of departure, methods that had been elaborated in the framework of the organic-dialectical theory of language, employed qualitative aspects of analysis, and operated with general and specific meaning components (see especially NyMDK. 1–11), but I based my conclusions primarily on the corpus data that I had processed. In my analyses, I did not employ statistical methods, and did not strive to approach the materials studied in a quantitative manner.

In analyses carried out in the framework of the organic-dialectical theory of language, bidirectional connections, interactions and mutual influences between meanings and meaning components are emphatically present. I tried to follow this approach in the present study, but I also departed from some of the ideas of the organic-dialectical theory of language where meaning components are seen as belonging to linguistic reality. In my view, meaning components do have linguistic reality on the one hand, given that (a) they emerge (are schematised) from concrete uses, and (b) it can be assumed that speakers are intuitively aware of (at least) the most characteristic and outstanding meaning components, those being part of their competence in the given language. On the other hand, these components are actually part of the descriptive model as they can be interpreted as researchers' formulation or representation of components that are not accurately represented in the speakers' minds; that is, meaning components are primarily potential tools of modelling the linguistic (semantic) phenomena at hand, by the help of which, in my view, we can obtain more complex accounts of the relationships and changes of verbal meanings than in terms of other possible ways of description.

Semantic analyses performed in this conceptional framework are based on continuous comparisons of the various occurrences, uses, and meanings of the given linguistic units (in our case, verbs). Nevertheless, my studies suggest that such comparisons are not only relevant across (literal and metaphorical) meanings of polysemous verbs: taking account of synonymous verbal meanings is just as important in staking out individual meanings and their relations.

4. Changes and limits of synonymy relationships across literal meanings at the level of metaphorical meanings – in the case of the verbs *bök*, *szúr* and *döf*

In what follows, via the analysis of the verbs *bök*, *szúr* and *döf*, I will seek to find out how their general and specific meaning components both connect and separate the meanings of these verbs at the level of literal meanings, and how the components of the literal meanings of these verbs constitute the basis of the synonymy (or lack thereof) of their metaphorical meanings. First, I will determine the literal meanings of the verbs under study here and establish how synonymy relations of the literal meanings can be based on their individual meaning components (Section 4.1). Then I will provide a detailed analysis of the meaning components assumed to be present in the metaphorical meanings and metaphorical meaning complexes of these verbs, with specific attention to how they contribute to the synonymy relationships across their metaphorical meanings; and, at the same time, I will explore the limits of synonymy (Section 4.2).

It is important to emphasise, however, that in this approach synonymy is not understood as complete identity of meaning, but rather as an interplay of similarities and differences (cf. Section 2.3). The verbs constituting the material of this investigation, as will be discussed in detail below

²³ Componential analysis figures in quite a few linguistic description types that may be widely different in other respects (see, e.g., Kiefer 2007: 63–90), but it is nevertheless often associated with formal/logical approaches to semantics. The present research is unambiguously situated within a functional framework; accordingly, and in harmony with the fundamental principles of the organic theory of language, meaning components are understood here not as formalisable, fixed and/or universal semantic primitives, but rather as constructs by the help of which dynamic and context-dependent properties of real language use can be captured.

in Section 4.1, can occur in the same syntactic environments in their literal meanings (too), yet their meanings do not completely coincide, and the expressions containing them can refer to different (but in some sense similar) portions of reality.

4.1. Synonymy at the level of literal meanings: similarities and differences

The literal meanings of *bök*, *szúr* and *döf* (more exactly, some meaning variants of their literal meanings) can be seen in the examples in (12)–(14) below:

(12) Radó oldalba **bökte** Csutakot (#26557130)

'Radó nudged [lit. **poked** the side of] Csutak'

Radó	oldal-ba	bök-t-e	Csutak-ot
Radó.NOM	side.SG-ILL	poke-PST-3SG	Csutak-ACC

(13) A kartonpapírra karácsonyi mintákat, figurákat, papírvirágokat ragasztottak. A tartóelem hátuljába 24 gombostűt **szúrtak** (#565370935)

'They glued Christmas patterns, figures, paper flowers on the cardboard. They **drove** 24 pins into the back of the support'

a tartó-elem	hátul-já-ba ²⁴	gombostű-t	szúr-t-ak
the support-element.SG.GEN	back-POSS.3SG-ILL	pin.SG-ACC	drive-PST-3PL

(14) a bicskát az első rossz szóra a legjobb haverjába **döfte** (#19533582)

'he **stabbed** the penknife into his best pal at the slightest offence'

a bicská-t	a legjobb haver-já-ba	döf-t-e
the penknife.SG-ACC	the best pal-POSS.3SG-ILL	stab-PST-3SG.DEF

In its literal meaning, *bök* involves touching,²⁵ the aim of which (if the interaction at hand is between persons) is often to raise the attention of someone; an example of this is illustrated in (12). In that process, the agent does not exert significant force; s/he makes a relatively slight movement, during which or because of which his/her hand, finger or elbow touches some person or other living creature or indeed an object at some point.

The verb *szúr* in its literal meaning gives a linguistic representation of situations in which the agent moves a pin or a pin-like pointed object or makes it get somewhere in a way that the given object penetrate some medium deeply in a brief/momentary process,²⁶ touching its surface at a single point (cf. Section 2.2).

The literal meaning of *döf* is rather similar to that of *szúr* in a certain respect: the agent, again, makes some pointed object penetrate some entity, and point-like touching is also relevant here; on the other hand, a decisive difference is that *döf* in its literal meaning refers to situations where the object is not a pin but a sharp knife or knife-like object (often used aggressively and ready for causing significant harm) that the agent drives into some medium with an assaultive intention and relatively great force.

²⁴ Az elem hátul-já-ba ~ az elem-nek a hátul-já-ba (cf. footnote 7.).
the element.SG.GEN back-POSS.3SG-ILL the element.SG.GEN the back-POSS.3SG-ILL

²⁵ It is primarily via this meaning component of 'touching' that the connection between the meanings of *bök* 'poke' and *lök* 'push' can be accounted for (e.g., *vki oldalba bök ~ lök vkit* 'somebody nudges ~ bumps into somebody').

²⁶ Momentariness can in fact characterise situations marked by the literal meanings of *bök* and *döf*, too, but in the meaning patterns of these verbs – in view of the metaphorical meanings and meaning relationships, too – this component does not appear to be linguistically relevant in a synchronic aspect.

The components determining the literal meanings of the three verbs,²⁷ as well as the similarities and differences of their literal meanings are summarised in Figure 2:

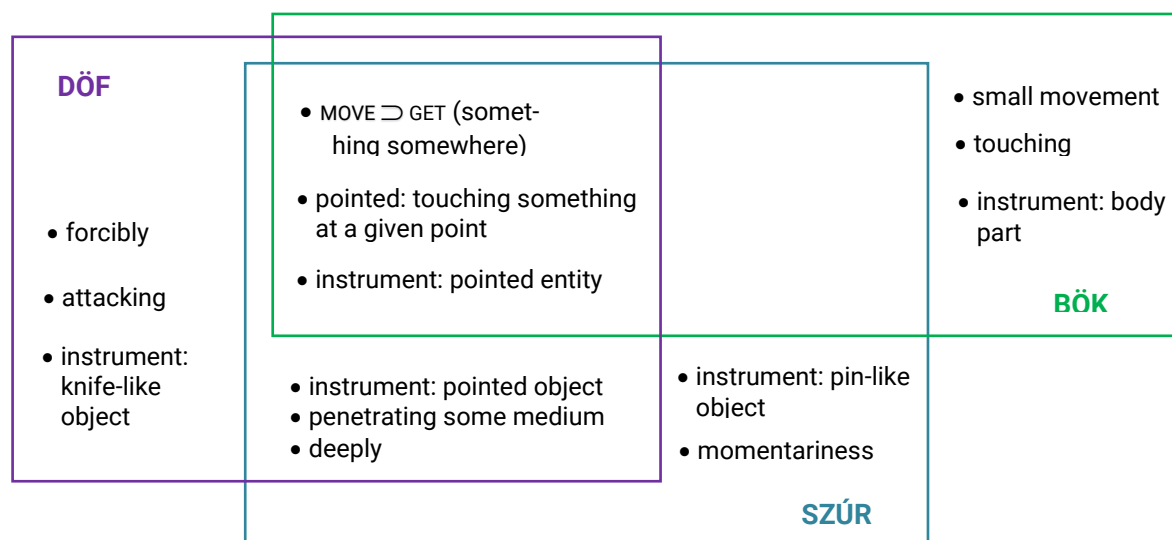


Figure 2. Decisive components of the literal meanings of *bök*, *szúr* and *döf*²⁸

As can be seen, synonymy is not understood as total identity of meaning in this case, either (cf. Section 2.3). Also, it cannot be said that it is necessarily linked to a neutralisation or backgrounding of the differences.

It is also worth pointing out that the three verbs cannot always be interchanged in their literal meanings. For instance, in an expression like *vki tört bök vkibe* ‘somebody pokes a dagger into somebody’ – that does not occur in the corpus but is a potentially acceptable construction – *bök* could only occur in a metaphorical sense. All three verbs occur in the same syntactic environment ($N_1 N_2$ -bA V N_3 -t [N_1 -NOM N_2 -ILL V N_3 -ACC]) in their literal meanings, but they cannot necessarily be interchanged in each lexical context (e.g., *vki oldalba V vkit* ‘somebody V somebody’s side’) without a substantial change in their meaning or in the meaning of the verb phrase as a whole (cf., e.g., *vki oldalba szúr ~ döf vkit* [somebody wounds somebody (typically with a sharp/pointed object)] vs. *vki oldalba bök vkit* [somebody touches somebody]).

In the following section I will explore how synonymy at the metaphorical level can be built upon the correspondences and meaning relationships sketched here and how differences that are not necessarily decisive in the literal meanings can lead in the case of some metaphorical meanings to the weakening or even the loss of a synonymy relationship.

4.2. Synonymy at the level of metaphorical meanings

As we have seen in Section 4.1, the meaning patterns of our three verbs characteristically differ from one another in some respects, even though similarities are also kept up. Such a difference, becoming

²⁷ It is important to emphasise that the components of literal meanings only get definable in the light of the metaphorical ones (cf., e.g., Zsilka 1975). Accordingly, the meaning components sketched here were pinned down after the analysis of the metaphorical meanings, but considerations of space do not make it possible to go into details concerning the analysis of individual metaphorical meanings. The meaning components that are relevant at the metaphorical level and play a decisive role in the synonymy relations of the three verbs will be described in Section 4.2 below.

²⁸ Small caps indicate general verbal component(s) here, while \supset refers to the relation of inclusion (that is, it shows that one component includes the other).

decisive during metaphorisation and/or in certain metaphorical meanings, is that *bök* refers to touching and to a relatively slight movement, whereas *döf* refers to a forceful movement carried out with a knife or some other object (like a dagger or a bayonet) capable of causing harm during an attack, and *szúr* refers to a brief or momentary action whose instrument is some thin, pointed, pin-like object (cf. 2.2). It is fundamentally these particulars that serve as the basis of distinctions across the diverse metaphorical meanings of these verbs. Considering these, it becomes understandable why low intensity and the process of pointing become salient in metaphorical meanings of *bök*, why components related to increased intensity, rudeness, and violence are foregrounded in the case of *döf*, and why the peculiarities of the meanings of *szúr* are partly given by components like momentariness, pointedness and penetration, and partly by the fact that its meanings (as opposed to those of *bök* and *döf*) are unspecified with respect to the degree of intensity.²⁹

<i>bök</i>	<i>szúr</i>	<i>döf</i>
(touching) with finger or elbow	with a pin or pin-like object	forcibly, in an attacking manner
small movement	pointedness	with a knife-like object
small intensity	unspecified for intensity	great intensity
directing attention		rudely, violently

Table 2. Correlations of specific meaning components determining the semantic patterns of *bök*, a *szúr* and *döf*

In what follows, I will go into details with respect to these generalisations, focusing on the issue of how, in exploring the interplay between the similarities and differences in the meanings of the three verbs, synonymy relationships between certain meanings of theirs can be described and how the changes of those relationships can be accounted for at the level of metaphorical meanings. Semantic similarities will primarily be detected in terms of general components defining verbal meaning types (cf. 2.2), while differences will be outlined taking into account, alongside these, also some specific components of the verbal meanings involved (not covering in this paper all general and specific meaning components of the verbs concerned, only mentioning those that play an important role in the synonymy relationships of the three verbs, and in the fate of similarities and differences across their meanings).

4.2.1. Maintaining synonymy: close synonymy relationships

In some metaphorical meanings of these verbs (and not only in ones that refer to concrete physical actions and thus are especially close to their literal meanings), synonymy between given meanings is interpreted as a relationship that is similar to (or even more close-knit than) that observable at the level of literal meanings. Semantic proximity of the relevant meanings of these verbs is also proved by the fact that all three verbs occur in similar or identical argument frames in these cases, often governing arguments belonging to the same semantic groups (or even the same lexical items). Proximity of the semantic relationships is also shown by the fact that the constructions involving the different verbs (unlike in the case of expressions involving these verbs in their literal meanings)

²⁹ This does not mean that *szúr* cannot refer to events characterisable by high intensity. Rather, this verb in the appropriate context or situation can refer to processes regarded as those of both low and increased intensity, and even to processes interpreted as neutral with respect to intensity.

can often be regarded as somewhat diverse representations of similar or even totally identical portions of reality.

As an example, consider the meaning type held together by the general component '**fasten**' that can be interpreted similarly in the meaning patterns of all three verbs. The verbs belonging to this meaning type fit into the following argument frame: 'somebody fastens something on/to something' [(N₁-NOM) V N₂-ACC N₃-SUB/N₃-ALL].³⁰ Meanings belonging here are close to the literal meanings of these verbs, but they are nevertheless analysed as metaphorical meanings here, given that, even though movement or causing movement plays a role in them, these meanings do not foreground that component, as opposed to the corresponding literal meanings, but the component of fastening itself. For instance:

- (15) Nem ujjába fogta a kenyeret, mint régen, hanem villára **bökte** (#33518508)
'He did not hold the bread between his fingers, as he used to, but **forked it**'

villá-ra **bök-t-e** a kenyér-et
fork.SG-SUB poke-PST-3SG.DEF the bread.SG-ACC

- (16) **Szúrjuk** nyársra a békacombokat (#243554430)
'Let's **skewer** the frog's legs'

szúr-juk nyárs-ra a béka-comb-ok-at
prick.PRS-1PL.DEF skewer.SG-SUB the frog-leg-PL-ACC

- (17) villára **döfték** a főtt sonkadarabokat (#26946466)
'they **forked** the pieces of cooked ham'

villá-ra **döf-t-ék** a sonka-darab-ok-at
fork.SG-SUB stab-PST-3PL.DEF the ham-piece-PL-ACC

If we now interpret these meanings of the three verbs with respect to one another, in that of *bök* (just like in the literal meaning of that verb) the component '(with) relatively small movement' is foregrounded, *döf* interprets the process as a forceful movement, and *szúr* draws attention to the pointed, pin-like shape of the skewer.

The verbs also refer to concrete physical movement in their meanings that can be classified into the meaning type '**make a move**' – and their meanings can again be described as in the previous case. The verbs occur in the following argument frame in this case: 'somebody makes a move to somewhere / in the direction of something' [(N₁-NOM) V N₂-ILL / N₂-NOM with a lative postposition].³¹ For instance:

- (18) A művésznő mutatóujjával **bökött** a levegőbe, az előszoba fogasa iránt. (#47474202)
'The actress **poked** her index finger to the air, in the direction of the hall's coat rack'

a művésznő a levegő-be **bök-ött**
the actress.SG.NOM the air.SG-ILL poke-PST.3SG

- (19) A közértes mutatóujjával oktatólag a levegőbe **szúrt** (#30055189)
'The shopkeeper **pierced** his index finger into the air, educatively'

³⁰ In the concrete expressions, the order of the arguments can vary, and some arguments can also be optional. Optionality is indicated by parentheses within square brackets.

³¹ In Hungarian, the function of adverbials can be fulfilled by an adverb (e.g. *felfelé* 'upwards'), a case-marked noun (e.g. *a levegő-be* 'into the air', see (18)–(19)), or a noun followed by a postposition (e.g. *az ég felé* 'towards the sky', see (20)), where postpositions are in general attached to the nominative form of the noun.

a közértes the shopkeeper.SG.NOM	a levegő-be the air.SG-ILL	szúr-t pierce-PST.3SG
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(20) mutatóujját a csillagos ég felé **döfte** (#171791699)
'he **stabbed** his index finger towards the starry sky'

mutató-ujj-á-t index-finger-POSS.3SG-ACC	az ég felé the sky towards	döf-t-e stab-PST-3SG.DEF
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The use of these verbs is probably motivated primarily by the shape of the index finger and (in a related manner) the component of being directed at the given point in all three cases. It is also worth observing here that, in accordance with the meaning of the verbal component of the expressions, air is linguistically construed as a substance in (18) and (19). The verb *bök* grabs the situation from the angle of pointing, the directing of attention (cf. *az előszoba fogasa iránt* 'in the direction of the hall's coat rack'), while *döf* grabs it from the angle of forceful (even rude) nature of the movement, and *szúr* foregrounds momentariness (that can be seen as suddenness) and the pointed shape of the finger.

The relationship among the verbal meanings can be similar in cases where the meanings of all three verbs move far away from their literal meanings; we can mention a meaning type involving the general component 'be directed' in this connection. In these cases, the verbal argument frame is as follows: 'something is directed somewhere / towards something'³² [(N₁-NOM) V N₂-ILL / N₂-SUB / N₂-NOM with a lative postposition]. For instance:

(21) Most látom az erődöt, járok is benne, annak is aranycsúcsocskája van, tűhegyes, mint egy színarany-ceruza **bök** az égbe a Néva túlszéljén. (#305791077)
'Now I see the fortress, I walk in it, it also has a tiny golden peak, pointed like a needle, **poking** the sky like a golden pencil on the other side of the River Neva'

az erőd the fortress.SG.GEN	arany-csúcs-ocská-ja ³³ golden-peak-DIM-POSS.3SG	az ég-be the sky.SG-ILL	bök poke.PRS.3SG
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(22) a földbe ásott nyurga fenyőállásfák büszkén **szúrtak** a kék égre (#44388277)
'the tall pine beams dug into the ground proudly **pierced** the blue sky'

a fenyő-állásfák the pine-beam-PL.NOM	az ég-re the sky.SG-SUB	szúr-t-ak pierce-PST-3PL
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³² The general meaning component 'be directed [at something]' is superimposed to the general component 'make a movement in a certain direction': the relevant movement in the case of these verbs usually means a movement with a hand, a finger, or some (relatively) pointed object, a movement that can be interpreted as a kind of pointing at something and is thus closely correlated with directionality. The difference between the two general meaning components and between the meaning types they define is that whereas 'make a movement in some direction' really involves movement, in the case of 'be directed [at something]' the verbs in general refer to a state as if it was an action, or construe a static property as a quasi-process (representing the bearer of the given property in an anthropomorphised manner, like the fortress (21), the beams (22) or the buds (23)).

³³ *az erőd* *csúcs-ocská-ja* ~ *az erőd-nek* *a csúcs-ocská-ja* (cf. footnote 7.).
the fortress.SG.GEN peak-DIM-POSS.3SG the fortress.SG.GEN the peak-DIM-POSS.3SG

- (23) Azután kertek sora mellett vezetett el az utunk, amelyek sövénykerítésén már kiütöztek a rügyek, bár még a gally barnás színét viselték, s szorosan összecsavarodva **dőftek** apró, hegyes fejükkel a tavasz közeledtétől megbolydult levegőbe. (#36644251)
 'Then our journey led us along a tier of gardens whose hedgerows burgeoned, though the buds still wore the brownish colour of the twigs, and **stabbed** their tiny, pointed heads into the air stirred by spring awakening'

a rügy-ek	a levegő-be	dőf-t-ek
the bud-PL.NOM	the air.SG-ILL	stab-PST-3PL

The meanings of the three verbs show, again, more (relevant) similarities than differences, and it can be observed again that the three verbs are potentially interchangeable with a small modification of the meaning of the given expression. Hence, we cannot speak of identical meanings here, either. In the meaning of *bök*, the component of (metaphorically) pointing at something is emphasised, not independently of the fact that in its literal meaning this verb usually refers to a movement of the hand, and that such movements are often interlocked with the intention of directing someone's attention to something. The verb *szúr* directs attention to the pointed shape of the pine beams, making an implicit parallel between the shape of needles and that of the beams, while *dőf* construes the process of burgeoning as one that involves increased intensity.³⁴

4.2.2. Neutralised differences

Whenever the relevant meanings of the three verbs are relatively close to one another, it may happen that the differences become irrelevant in certain contexts and shared components come to the fore. The following examples – where the verb meanings can be grouped into a meaning type defined by the general meaning component '**produce: cause to emerge**' (cf. 2.2) – illustrate cases in which the differences of the verb meanings are not necessarily relevant (given that these expressions depict the situation as seen from the end point, the result – i.e., the emergence of the hole – and from that point of view the traits of the process leading to the given result are not really decisive). The verbal argument frame in this case is: '(somebody) produces something by penetrating somewhere (into or onto something) (with something)' [(N₁-NOM) V N₂-ACC N₃-ILL / N₃-SUB (N₄-INS)].

- (24) Csavarhúzóval **böktem** lyukat az olajsárra, és így tudtam csak leengedni, nem kicsit lepődtem meg. (#1107581256)
 'I **poked** a hole in the oily mud with a screwdriver, that's how I could deflate it, not a little surprised'

lyuk-at	bök-t-em	az olaj-sár-ra
hole.SG-ACC	poke-PST-1SG	the oil-mud.SG-SUB

- (25) Ha veszel egy üres papírt, **szúrsz** belé egy apró lyukat, és azon keresztül nézel, sokkal élesebb lesz a kép (már ha egyébként nem az). (#119390272)
 'If you take a clean sheet of paper, **pierce** a little hole in it, and you look through it, the picture will be much sharper (if it is not that otherwise)'

lyuk-at	szúr-sz	egy papír-ba
hole.SG-ACC	pierce.PRS-2SG	a sheet-of-paper.SG-ILL

³⁴ The differences mentioned here do not mean, of course, that the meanings of the three verbs can be clearly separated: reference to pointedness is a component that can be found in the given meaning of *bök* and *dőf*, too, the component of directedness may also be relevant in the meaning of *szúr*, etc. On the other hand, the verbal meanings differ in what primary point of view they choose for referring to the situation, and which property of the situation they choose to seize the situation linguistically.

- (26) Amélie az olló hegyével új lyukat akart **döfni** az övre (#42946706)
 'Amélie wanted to **stab** new holes in the belt with the points of the scissors'

lyuk-at	döf-ött	az öv-re
hole.SG-ACC	stab-PST.3SG	the belt.SG-SUB

4.2.3. Foregrounded differences

There are furthermore cases where, although the general meaning component determining the meaning type can be assumed to be shared by the three verbs, some metaphorical meanings of the verbs diverge more than the literal meanings do; in that case, the diverging or distinct components of the meanings of the verbs are foregrounded. Although all three verbs can cooccur with (lexically speaking) similar or even identical arguments in such cases, the expressions involving the individual verbs may interpret the relevant components of reality in characteristically different manners.³⁵ (These components of reality might occasionally be rather similar, but they also may differ from each other in important respects.) An example of this can be observed in the case of the meaning type featuring the general component 'hit'. The verb occurs in the following argument structures: '(somebody) hits somebody (with something) in/on something' [(N₁-NOM) V N₂-ACC (N₃-INS) N₄-ILL/N₄-SUP].

- (27) Apám és egy tótul gagyogó béres kézzel-lábbal magyarázták, hogy az erdész, erdész, kell neki a puska. Mindkettőt hasba **bökték** a géppisztollyal, s terelték a falhoz. (#12180341)
 'My father and a skip who could speak Slovak a bit explained tooth and nail that the forester was a forester and needed the gun. Both were **nudged** in the stomach with submachineguns and herded to the wall.'

has-ba	bök-t-ék	ők-et	a géppisztoly-lal
stomach.SG-ILL	nudge-PST-3PL.DEF	they-ACC	the submachinegun.SG-INST

- (28) A csíki pap szeretett volna örömeiben a nyakába ugrani, de csak a könyökével **szúrta** oldalba barátját (#796378)
 'The priest from Csík felt like falling upon his neck with joy, but he only **dubbed** his friend in the side with his elbow'

oldal-ba	szúr-t-a	barát-já-t	a könyök-é-vel
side.SG-ILL	dub-PST-3SG.DEF	friend-POSS.3SG-ACC	the elbow-POSS.3SG-INST

- (29) a polgármester futó pillantással észlelvén, hogy kiről van szó, megtiltja az erőszakos eltávolítást, de azt már nem tudja megakadályozni, hogy nehéz férfiak körülállják a vakmerőt, és könyökkel gyomorszájon **döfjék** (#23560360)
 'the mayor noticed with a quick glance who it was, and forbade his violent removal, but he could not prevent the heavy-built men from surrounding the daring guy and **stabbing** their elbows into the pit of his stomach'

gyomorszáj-on	döf-ik	ő-t	könyök-ke-l
pit-of-stomach.SG-SUP	stab.PRS-3PL.DEF	he-ACC	elbow.SG-INST

In the example in (27), the speaker represents the given process by using *bök*, as a relatively small movement, or an act of relatively low intensity. Here, *bök* suggests diminished intensity not only

³⁵ This category is not clearly distinct from that discussed in 4.2.1; the difference between them is a matter of degree.

relative to *szúr* or *döf*, but also relative to other verbs of the synonym range characterised by the general component ‘hit (somebody)’, e.g. *üt* ‘strike’ or *ver* ‘beat up’, too. Or at least, it implies that the persons referred to could have been “herded” to the wall more violently, with more forceful and rough movements, too. In this context, the use of either *szúr* or *döf* would be more unexpected, since these verbs in similar contexts would suggest causing severe harm, even lethal injuries.

In (28), *szúr* primarily serves to direct the reader’s attention to the pointy character of the elbow; but it can also suggest that, as opposed to *oldalba bök* ‘nudge in the side’, this is not simply a matter of touching, but some kind of hitting, even if the component of causing (severe) pain does not arise. In the expression *oldalba bök valakit* ‘nudge somebody’ the verb *bök* typically refers to touching someone to raise his/her attention, whereas *oldalba döf* ‘stab in the side’ implies a forceful and rude movement: thus, although in this context the three verbs would be interchangeable in principle, the expressions involving the three verbs do not refer to exactly the same components of reality, and imply different speaker’s attitudes; hence, they would interpret the linguistically construed event in three different manners.

In (29), the context makes it clear that a violent and attacking action is referred to, during which the agents hit the person rather forcefully; this is made even more obvious by using *döf* in the expression *könyökkel gyomorszájon döfték* ‘stabbed their elbows into the pit of his stomach’. This is why *szúr* or *bök* could not replace *döf* in the given case, even though both verbs could occur in similar syntactic constructions both in a structural and in a lexical sense. In this case, synonymy is curbed by the meaning of other linguistic items in the utterance.

4.2.4. The limits of synonymy: non-synonymous uses

In discussing the role of general components of verbal meanings, we have already seen (2.2) that it is not merely the diverse meanings of polysemous verbs that can be organised into meaning types, but it is also possible that synonymy ranges can be set up on that basis, in which these general verbal meaning components can hold together similar meanings of different verbs, too. By the general verbal meaning components (interpreted as) being shared it becomes easy to explain the arising and maintenance of synonymy relationships.

In Section 4.2 so far, we have reviewed cases in which a single meaning component played a decisive role in the semantic pattern of all three verbs – but this is not necessarily so.

(A) There are also general meaning components that are only shared by the relevant meanings of two of the investigated verbs, *bök* and *szúr*.

As an example, we can mention the meaning type (and synonymy range) characterised by the meaning component ‘**cause (physical) pain or inconvenience**’ (cf. Section 2.2). Here, the argument structure of the verb is ‘somebody/something causes (physical) pain/inconvenience’ [N-NOM V]. This component can only be attested, within the material processed here, in certain meanings of *bök* and *szúr* as a shared component; in other words, *döf* is excluded from the synonymy range here.

- (30) Ott nincs semmi víz a közelben de most még minden csupa harmat, ilyenkor jobban összeállnak, nem **böknek** annyira a búzaszálak. (#263839107)

‘There’s no water nearby, but everything is still covered by dew, at such times, wheat-stalks stick together more, they do not **prickle** that much.’

bök-nek	a búza-szál-ak
prickle.PRS-3PL	the wheat-stalk-PL.NOM

- (31) Tudtam, hogy vigyázni kell, a bokor ágai egyremásra [sic!] lehajlanak, tüskések, kegyetlenül **szúrnak**. (#8774)

‘I knew I had to be careful, the branches of the shrub cower all the time, they are spiky, they **sting** terribly’

szúr-nak	a bokor	ág-ai ³⁶
sting.PRS-3PL	the shrub.SG.GEN	branch-POSS.PL.NOM

Although *bök* construes the effect linguistically as an inconvenience, while *szúr* rather construes it as an instance of pain, in (30)–(31) – where the verbs refer to a property rather than to a process – the two verbs would be interchangeable in principle, and their meanings have a relation of close synonymy. On the other hand, *döf* does not occur in such expressions, at least as witnessed by the material under study here.³⁷

It is also worth pointing out that in most examples belonging to this meaning type it is the verb *szúr* that occurs, and since in a majority of the relevant cases some part(s) of the context unambiguously show(s) that a mordant pain, a stich in the side, a bright flash of light, a strong stinging odour, or other intensive stimuli are meant, the verb *bök* (implying low intensity) cannot occur in the given expression in such cases, even though the shared general meaning component of the two verbs would in principle make their interchangeability possible. For instance:

- (32) Lehunyta a szemét, fejét a nap felé fordította. Szemhéján keresztül **szúrtak** a sugarak. (#51364)
'She closed her eyes and turned her head towards the sun. The rays **stung** even through her eyelids.'

szúr-t-ak	a sugar-ak
sting-PST-3PL	the ray-PL.NOM

- (33) Hagyma- és jácintszag borult az arca fölé. Élvezettel beszívta. **Szúrta** a koponyáját a színnek káprázatos ragyogása (#19363611)
'Odours of onion and hyacinth covered her face. She inhaled them with gusto. Her skull **was stung** by the gorgeous brilliance of colours'

szúr-t-a	a koponyá-já-t	a szín-ek	ragyogás-a ³⁸
sting-PST-3SG.DEF	the skull-POSS.3SG-ACC	the colour-PL.GEN	brilliance-POSS.3SG.NOM

- (34) Atyámfia, az írás már terhemre van. November. **Szúr** az agyagvázában száradó krizantenumok szaga. (#19125008)
'Brother, writing has become a nuisance for me. November. The smell of the chrysanthemums drying in the clay pot **is stinging**.'

szúr	a krizantenum-ok	szag-a ³⁹
sting.PRS.3SG	the chrysanthemum-PL.GEN	smell-POSS.3SG.NOM

³⁶ *a bokor* *ág-ai* ~ *a bokor-nak* *az ág-ai* (cf. footnote 7.)
the shrub.SG.GEN branch-POSS.PL.NOM the shrub.SG.GEN the branch-POSS.PL.NOM (cf. footnote 9.).

³⁷ Causing physical pain can also be described by *döf*, as illustrated by expressions of the type exemplified in (29). However, in that case, other general components of the meaning of that verb ('get [something somewhere]', 'hit [somebody]') are the dominant ones. Both *bök* and *szúr* are intransitive in the meanings determined by the general meaning component 'cause (physical) pain' – but no such use of *döf* is attested in the material I examined. It cannot be excluded in principle that this verb, too, should develop an intransitive meaning determined by the general meaning component 'cause (physical) pain or inconvenience' (e.g. *?döf a túske* 'the prickle jabs'), but no data have been documented for such a use yet.

³⁸ *a szín-ek* *ragyogás-a* ~ *a szín-ek-nek* *a ragyogás-a* (cf. footnote 7.)
the colour-PL.GEN brilliance-POSS.3SG.NOM the colour-PL.GEN the brilliance-POSS.3SG.NOM

³⁹ *a krizantenum-ok* *szag-a* ~ *a krizantenum-ok-nak* *a szag-a* (cf. footnote 7.).
the chrysanthemum-PL.GEN smell-POSS.3SG.NOM the chrysanthemum-PL.GEN the smell-POSS.3SG.NOM

Similar phenomena can be observed in the case of the meaning type defined by the general meaning component 'inconvenience'. This component, again, only connects the relevant meanings of *szúr* and *bök*; but here a type of troubling effect is at stake that is not taken in a physical sense. The relevant argument frame is 'somebody/something bothers somebody' [N₁-NOM V N₂-ACC]. For instance:

- (35) Zoltánt még ezer kérdés **bökte**, de leintették, hogy aludjon, s ő le is hunyta a szemét (#34002859)

'Zoltán was **poked** by a thousand further questions, but he was snubbed and told to go to sleep, and he closed his eyes, too'

Zoltán-t	ezer kérdés	bök-t-e
Zoltán-ACC	thousand question.SG.NOM	poke-PST-3SG.DEF

- (36) Micó emléke változatlanul **szúrta** Katalint⁴⁰ (#41107093)

'Micó's memory kept **stinging** Katalin'

Micó	emlék-e ⁴¹	szúr-t-a	Katalin-t
Micó.GEN	memory-POSS.3SG.NOM	sting-PST-3SG.DEF	Katalin-ACC

We can also mention the general component 'pain', too, that may be part of the meaning pattern of both *bök* and *szúr*, but that is alien to that of *döf*. The relevant argument frame is this: 'something hurts' [N-NOM V].

- (37) [...] kamillás vattával törölgetem a szemem, és basszus még délelőtt egy laza mozdulattal megtöröltem a másik szememet is vele.... már érzem hogy hiba volt, már **bök szúr** az is (#1162772911)

'I wipe my eye with a camomile wad, and shit in the morning I wiped the other eye, too, with a sloppy gesture... I felt that this was a mistake, now that other eye also **hurts** and **twinges**'

bök	szúr	a szem-e
poke.PRS.3SG	sting.PRS.3SG	the eye-POSS.3SG.NOM

- (38) Kőhidai csak akkor lassította le a lépteit, mikor az oldala már **szúrta** (#31703605)

'Kőhidai slowed down his steps only when his side was already **stinging**'

szúr-t	az oldal-a
sting-PST.3SG	the side-POSS.3SG.NOM

Another thing that can be observed in these cases is that according to the testimony of the corpus data processed certain general meaning components can be more closely linked to one of the verbs than to the other (e.g. 'pain' can be more often definitive in the meanings of *szúr*, while only some of the occurrences of *bök* can be classified as belonging to this range of synonyms).

(B) In other cases, a given meaning component is attached to the semantic pattern of only one of the verbs. In such cases, lack of a shared general meaning component necessarily results in the

⁴⁰ This example occurs in the 'works of fiction' subcorpus of HGC and comes from Magda Szabó's novel *A Danaida* (*The Danaid*). The name *Micó* in it refers to the first (now dead) wife of Katalin's husband. For a better understanding of the meaning of the verb *szúr*, it is worthwhile to take a larger context into consideration: "[Katalin] őrizte magában az alapélményt: a holt Micó ma is fontosabb ebben a házban, mint ő, az élő." 'She [= Katalin] guarded the key experience in her soul: Micó, now dead, was more important in this house than she herself was, alive.'

⁴¹ *Micó* *emlék-e* ~ *Micó-nak* *az emlék-e* (cf. footnote 7.).
Micó.GEN memory-POSS.3SG.NOM Micó.GEN the memory-POSS.3SG.NOM

meaning patterns of the verbs getting distanced from one another, and the synonymy relationship of the verbs ceases to exist.

An example of this is the meaning type defined by the meaning component ‘select’ that can only be attested in the case of *bök* within the material under investigation. The assumption of the general meaning component ‘select’ can be justified by the fact that within the semantic pattern of *bök*, as has been pointed out above, the component of pointing out is emphatic, and the fact that with the poking movement the agent directs attention to something, as if marking off the given entity. The verb’s argument frame is in this case: ‘somebody pokes’ [N-NOM V].

- (39) Nem tudom, másoknak mi kell, hogy mire figyelnek, amikor autót vesznek, de magamról [...] tudom, hogy elsősorban nem a belbecsre figyelek, amikor **bökök** (#540411522)
 ‘I don’t know what others need, what they pay attention to when they buy a car, but for myself, I know I do not primarily mind internal values when I **point one out**’

bök-ök

poke.PRS-1SG

In the case of *szúr*, a general meaning component specifically linked to the meaning pattern of the verb is ‘insert’. (This component is related to the following meaning components of the literal meaning: ‘instrument: pin-like pointed object’, ‘pointedly’, and ‘penetrating some medium’. The verb in such cases cooccurs with the following arguments: ‘somebody inserts something somewhere’ [(N₁-NOM) V N₂-ACC N₃-ILL / N₃-NOM with a lative postposition]. For instance:

- (40) Gáspár pedig visszaveszi tőlem [az ernyőt], a drótjait dugdossa egy darabig, majd kímélet nélkül az ülés alá **szúrja** az egészet⁴² (#45341928)
 ‘Gáspár takes it [the umbrella] back from me, keeps tucking its wires for a while, then he indelicately **sticks** the whole thing under the seat’

Gáspár	az ülés	alá	szúr-ja	az ernyő-t
Gáspár.NOM	the seat	under	stick.PRS-3SG.DEF	the umbrella.SG-ACC

- (41) A kijelölt ütem elé **szúrja** az ütemet vagy ütemeket⁴³ (#258778805)
 ‘He **sticks** the bar or bars before the determined bar [of the musical piece]’

a kijelölt ütem	elé	szúr-ja	az ütem-et
the determined bar	before	stick.PRS-3SG.DEF	the bar.SG-ACC

The specific components mentioned (‘instrument: pointed object (like a pin)’, ‘pointedly’, and ‘penetrating some medium’) are shown by the analyses to play a role in the literal meaning of *dőf*, too, but within the semantic pattern of *dőf* one cannot abstract away from the reference to increased intensity, a fact that restricts the range of contexts that the verb can be used in, and limits the kinds of metaphorical meanings it can develop. A related fact may be that we find examples referring to attacking people (stabbing [or even killing] them in a concrete physical sense, or stabbing them in the back in a metaphorical sense) among expressions involving *dőf* in a significantly higher ratio of occurrence than in the case of the other two verbs. The meanings of this verb are less diversified, and the material processed here does not allow us to set up a meaning type (or even a single meaning) that could be attested only in occurrences of *dőf*, to the exclusion of the other two verbs.

⁴² In the case of (40), the emphasis is not primarily on the material characteristics of the medium, but rather on the act of entering a defined space – whether that space is pre-existing or created as a consequence of the action.

⁴³ In this example, the use of *szúr* could have been motivated by the verbs *közbeszúr* ‘interpolate’ and *beszúr* (*valamit valahová*) ‘insert (something somewhere)’, too. These are instances of *szúr* prefixed by a preverb.

4.3. Changes and limits of synonymy relationships across literal meanings at the level of metaphorical meanings: an overview

The literal meanings of *bök*, *szúr* and *döf* are highly similar to one another, and that similarity is what underlies the fact that their meanings often change during metaphorisation in similar directions – hence, the synonymy relations of their literal meanings are basically maintained in most of their metaphorical meanings, too. On the other hand, some characteristic differences can also be spotted across their meanings at the level of literal meanings, and this fact serves as a basis for their semantic changes (in metaphorisation) to be describable as divergent in some cases.

The synonymy relations of the literal meanings of these verbs may not only be maintained during metaphorisation (even to the point of remaining unchanged) but can even be strengthened, provided that the differences across the relevant meanings of the given verbs get neutralised or become irrelevant in the context at hand. But synonymy relations can become weaker, too, if the differences between the meanings are foregrounded in some metaphorical occurrences. Whenever there is no shared general component to interconnect the meanings of the verbs by organising them into a single range of synonyms, or there is some specific meaning component(s) belonging to the semantic pattern of the given verb that limit(s) the use of the verb at hand, the synonymy relation can even cease to exist at all.

The network of relationships across the meanings of the three verbs and their similar and diverging meaning components are summarised in Figure 3:⁴⁴

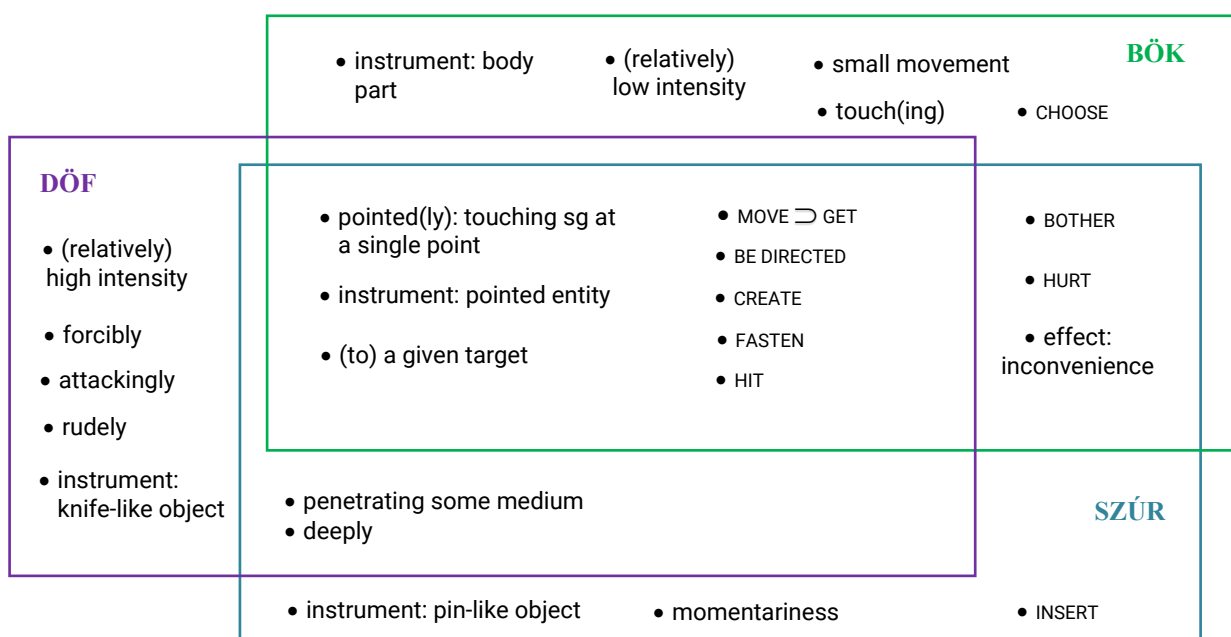


Figure 3. Meaning components making up the semantic pattern and meaning relations of *bök*, *szúr* and *döf*

The results of our investigations corroborate the assumption mentioned in Section 2.2 above that, within the system of meanings of polysemous verbs, individual meaning components mutually influence and modulate one another, and hence they can be interpreted in diverse ways within the semantic patterns of distinct verbs. This phenomenon is closely related to the fact that similar meaning components of different verbs that are synonymous in their literal meanings may change

⁴⁴ The figure does not include all general and specific meaning components of the three verbs, only those that are mentioned in the foregoing analyses. Meaning components that have not been discussed for lack of space and are thus not included in the figure also corroborate the tendencies we have seen.

in metaphorisation in partly diverse directions. On the other hand, a factor that can contribute to the weakening or elimination of synonymy relations observable in some metaphorical meanings is that certain meaning components that are not (or not necessarily) relevant in the literal meanings of the given verbs, but account for characteristic differences across the semantic patterns of the verbs, can come to the fore in those metaphorical meanings.

All these considerations lead us to conclude that modelling verbal meanings via general and specific meaning components can contribute not only to the discovery of correspondences within polysemous patterns of meanings but also to a reliable description and better understanding of the relationships across the meanings of diverse verbs.

5. Summary and outlook

In this paper, I have offered a case study analysing synonymy relations of the verbs *bök*, *szúr* and *dőf* and tried to answer the question of how the synonymy of those verbs in their literal meanings may emerge and change at the level of metaphorical meanings and how this correlates with the general and specific meaning components assumed to be present in their polysemous system of meanings.

The results have confirmed the idea that the individual (assumed) meaning components of the patterns of verbal meanings are not to be interpreted as discrete and separate units but as ones that continually and mutually influence and modulate one another, and can, consequently, only be described by taking their dynamic interrelationships into consideration.

Furthermore, it became evident that a close relationship of synonymy across the literal meanings of these verbs serves as a basis for synonymy across their metaphorical meanings via their shared or very similar meaning components – but also as a factor that leads to the weakening or even the loss of synonymy via their components that can be seen to differ.

In addition, an important conclusion arose: although in modelling synonymy relationships it is the shared general and more schematic verbal meaning components (or ones that can be assumed to be shared) that can be seen as the primary semantic basis of synonymy, we cannot understand the properties of synonymy relations without taking the specific meaning components of the relevant meanings into consideration.

In this paper, verbal synonymy was explored from the direction of its relationship with polysemy. A definition of verbal synonymy in terms of empirical semantic analyses, as well as the exploration of its limits and its correspondences with other semantic phenomena (like antonymy, hyponymy or hypernymy) must remain for further studies. The inclusion of further, even more extensive corpus-based materials, and additional exploration of verbs whose literal meanings belong to other meaning types (that is, verbs not referring to concrete movement in a physical sense) may also contribute to making the conclusions more accurate, more nuanced, and more comprehensive.

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Abbreviations

ACC	accusative
DIM	diminutive
GEN	genitive
ILL	illative

INST	instrumental (case)
NOM	nominative
PL	plural
POSS	possessive
PRS	present tense
PST	past tense
SG	singular
SUB	sublative
SUP	superessive

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