

# A SEMANTIC DESCRIPTION OF TWO MEANINGS OF *ELVAN* IN THE DIALECT OF NYITRAGERENCSÉR

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## Abstract

*The present paper offers a semantic description of two meanings of the verb elvan (consisting of the preverb el- 'away' and the verb van 'be') in the dialect of Nyitragerencsér. Compared to the standard language variety, the lexeme has an additional meaning in the dialect in question, namely the marking of constant spatial distance. The analysis makes it clear how the preverb contributes to meaning generation. Whereas in the dialectal meaning 'be far', the preverb does not affect the temporal reference of van 'be', it does so in the second meaning ('passes time by having fun'), where the ongoing, enduring nature of the activity is in profile.*

*Cognitive semantics aims primarily at the description of meanings by exploring the building up and schematisation of conceptual structures. Linguistic units, which can be schematised or specific to varying degrees, are studied in context, i.e. against the background of texts derived from natural speech situations. In this way, cognitive semantics breaks with the tradition of describing language as an end in itself, and complies with the requirements of functionalist linguistics (cf. Ladányi–Tolcsvai Nagy 2008: 33). As Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy puts it, “the self-reflexive experiential sphere and Erwartungshorizont of the new millenium is aware of, and demands, usage data (...)” (Tolcsvai Nagy 2011). Accordingly, my study relies on corpus data collected and recorded by the dialectologist Ferenc Sima. Sima collected the dialectal vocabulary of the Nyitra region, including that of the village of Nyitragerencsér, with the aim of preparing a dialectal dictionary. However, his illness prevented him from completing this task (Sándor 2007).*

*The paper adopts the theoretical and descriptive framework of Ronald Langacker (1987, 2008), in which the preverb and the verb are to be interpreted as forming a composite structure. I have previously offered a description based on the notion of blending (Tóth 2013); however, an account in terms of composite structures promises to be more detailed and precise. The analysis aims to contribute to our understanding of semantic extensions affecting the preverb el 'away', and to shed light on the basis of functional variability.*

**Keywords:** cognitive semantics, composite structure, Nyitragerencsér dialect, preverb, semantic structure, verb

## 1. The preverb *el* 'away' and the existential verb *van* 'be'

The process of Hungarian preverbs taking on new functions has been going hand in hand with their grammaticalisation (Ladányi 2007: 95). with regard to preverbs, two phases of grammaticalisation can be discerned. The first of these produced the word class of preverbs (from adverbs, and ultimately from nominals with a lative suffix), as well as the systemic

organisation of its members by the end of the Old Hungarian period. The second phase is still unfolding in the present, and is characterised by further semantic extensions and abstractions affecting the class, as well as an increase in token frequency.

The opacisation of the original directional meaning of preverbs and their increase in token frequency are two processes which mutually reinforce each other (D. Máta 1991: 433–434). Grammaticalisation includes a range of functional, phonological, grammatical and (crucially) semantic changes, among them the generalisation of meaning with the loss of semantic specifications. However, grammaticalisation also involves semantic enrichment. In the process of metaphorical extension, the semantics of the target domain contributes to the development of grammatical meaning, hence the semantic aspect of grammaticalisation cannot be equated with the loss of meaning specifications (Sweetser 1988, Ladányi 2005). Semantic generalisation and enrichment are best demonstrated on historical texts; however, they can also be illustrated by the description of particular meanings.

As a result of grammaticalisation, the meaning of preverbs is schematic, simple, highly abstract and polysemous, which allows them to fulfill a variety of functions. The meanings of a polysemous linguistic unit form a network in which secondary meanings are related to the core meaning via semantic extension (Cuyckens–Zawada 2001, Tolcsvai Nagy 2010: 113–115). In their primary meaning, most preverbs express movement or directionality along a path, with respect to physical space, implying a spatial endpoint for the activity denoted by the verb when the end of the path has been reached. By marking directions of action, preverbs construe displacements in the spatial structure created by language (Szilágyi N. 1996: 17). They profile a part of spatial structure in their primary meanings, and allow for the perception and interpretation of subtle distinctions in directionality, similarly to the function of suffixes with a spatial meaning. On the other hand, the directional meaning of preverbs has gradually moved to the background, with temporal reference taking centre stage in the focus of attention. As Mária Ladányi remarks, temporal boundedness (perfectivity) was the first secondary meaning to be added to the primary spatial one, owing to the fact that the reaching of a spatial endpoint coincides with a temporal one (Ladányi 1999: 127–129). In some cases, when the action itself does not imply movement, the preverb may be central to the expression of the passing of time (e.g. *tart* 'hold' vs. *eltart* 'endure, last', cf. Kövecses 2005: 36–39). what stands in the focus of attention is not so much the directionality attached to a process but rather the temporal boundedness thereof, i.e. perfectivity.

Prototypically, the preverb *el* expresses directionality. This meaning can be characterised as follows: *el* represents the spatial position of an entity (the trajector) in relation to bounded space (serving as landmark), where the trajector in the preverb's conceptual structure moves along a PATH from a SOURCE to a GOAL. More specifically, the entity serving as trajector (primary figure) is moving away from a place (functioning as landmark, or secondary figure), within three-dimensional space (Tolcsvai Nagy 2010: 70–71).

The existential verb *van* 'be' is one of the most basic and most frequent verbs of Hungarian, its semantic description is nevertheless far from simple. In the Historical-Etymological Dictionary of Hungarian (Történeti-etimológiai szótár, TESZ), the verb's lexical entry includes the following passage: "the original meaning may have been 'that which exists'. The verbal function of the word is secondary, and its development is closely related to the consolidation of *vagy* as a second person singular verb form. *Van* as a third person singular form emerged relatively late, through back formation from the third person singular *vannak* [*vagy-nak* ~ *vadnak*]." Given the source of development mentioned above, the word may have

originally been a nomenverbum-like element, “interpretable as a first, second, or third person verb form, but also as a noun meaning ‘that which exists; an existing person’ (Benkő ed. 1976: 1084–1085). The New Hungarian Dialectal Dictionary (Új magyar tájszótár) also remarks that the word used to have a nominal function in some dialect (B. Lőrinczy ed. 2010: 631).

Despite its rich meaning, the existential verb has received less attention than it deserves in Hungarian semantic studies. A detailed description of distinctions between particular meanings is yet to be elaborated. In her paper, Márta Varga H. (2010) distinguishes between six functions of the verb, namely the expression of i. existence, ii. existence with a partitive meaning, iii. existence modified by an adverbial, as well as iv. use as an auxiliary, v. use as a verb of possession, and vi. use as part of a passive construction expressing a state (*lenni* ‘be’ + *-va, -ve* ‘<participial suffix>’ pattern). However, she does not provide an elaborate semantic description, and does not back up her categorisation with arguments. The Dictionary of the Hungarian Language (*Értelmező kéziszótár*) only lists two meanings: “1. Exists. 2. Is in some state of under certain circumstances” (Pusztai ed. 2003: 1428–1429).

The primary function of the existential verb is the expression of existence; it can also construe a state in continuous aspect, with a full paradigm (Langacker 2008: 125, Tolcsvai Nagy 2009: 379). Similarly to other verbs, it profiles a process; compared to verbs of movement, this process is more abstract. Its semantic structure includes mental representations of a trajector (SOMETHING) and a landmark (SOMEWHERE), but at a high level of abstraction.

## 2. The meanings of *elvan*

The Dictionary of the Hungarian Language lists two meanings of the verb *elvan* (consisting of the preverb *el-* ‘away’ and the verb *van* ‘be’): “1. To be able to stay somewhere or in some state (for some time), 2. To get along with somebody (for some time)” (Pusztai ed. 2003: 300). By contrast, the New Hungarian Dialectal Dictionary supplies four meanings: 1. ‘to be away, to be absent’, 2. ‘to stay somewhere’, 3. <c.g. about news> ‘to spread’, 4. <with pejorative evaluation> ‘to be just about acceptable’ (B. Lőrinczy ed. 1988: 172–173). The above specifications are far from exhausting the semantics of *elvan*. Not only do they fail to cover all the corpus examples to be examined in the next section, but they also insufficiently account for examples found in the Hungarian National Corpus (henceforth HNC).

Based on the 1.267 tokens<sup>1</sup> found in the HNC2 (the new, updated version of the corpus), at least five meanings can be discerned (without detailed semantic analysis). The distinctions between them are somewhat arbitrary, as it is impossible to draw a neat boundary between them; the most adequate presentation would take the form of a semantic network.<sup>2</sup> Below is a list of the five meanings in question, illustrated by sample sentences.

(1) ‘make a (good) living; do all right; get along (with each other); bear’

a. (...) a honvédelmi tárcánál és környékén mindenki jól *elvan*.

‘At the defence ministry and around it everybody is doing all right.’

<sup>1</sup> The preverb+verb structure of *elvan* is highly lexicalised, as also suggested by the fact that there are no occurrences in the HNC2 in which the preverb and the verb would be separate.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed corpus study may allow a more refined analysis of meanings; here I only provide the semantic groups which minimally need to be distinguished.

b. Csak léteznek, vannak. Jól *elvannak* ott, a maguk Párizsaiban és Perzsiáiban.  
'They are just existing, living. They are getting along well there, in their own Parises and Persias.'

c. Más szavakkal: az evolúció, a tudományos elmélet jól *elvan* Isten nélkül is – és ezt Te írtad le.

'In other words: evolution, the scientific theory is doing all right even without God – and You wrote this.'

(2) 'stay/survive in a good shape for some time; function (somewhere)'

a. Állítólag ebben hosszú évtizedekig is *elvan* egy üveg bor, akárcsak egy pincében.  
'They say that in this a bottle of wine can survive for decades, just like in a cellar.'

b. Akkumulátora 800 mAh-s kapacitású, ezzel átlagosan 3 napig elég jól *elvan*, mire töltő után kellene néznünk.

'Its battery has a capacity of 800 mAh, with this it survives 3 days on average before we need to look for a charger.'

(3) 'occupy oneself, pass time while having fun (or staying idle)'

a. Anyuka betérhet ide gyerekekkel is pár percre, mert a gyerek *elvan*, amíg ő barnul.  
'Mummy can pop in here for a few minutes even with a child, because the child is occupying himself while she is tanning.'

b. Nincs hát benne semmi csodálni való, hogy órák hosszáig *elvag yok* egymagam-ban és boldogan merengek el az emlékezetemben felvonuló képeken.

'So there is nothing strange about it that I am able to occupy myself for hours on end, and linger on happily with the images in my memory.'

(4) 'bear something; stay busy with somebody/something or the thought of something'

a. Háromkor erős fájdalomra ébredtem, de valahogy *elvoltam* vele reggelig, amikor megnézett Cs. doktor.

'At 3 o'clock I woke up with a strong pain, but somehow I managed to bear it until the morning, when doctor Cs. arrived.'

b. Egyszerűen dolgoznak es *elvannak* a maguk építette világában.

'They are simply working and staying busy in the world they have built for themselves.'

(5) 'be far; be away'

a. Már egész gyerekkorral is sokszor *elvoltam* hazulról.

'Already as a child I was often away from home.'

b. Hát vártalak - gondolhatod - amíg *elvoltál* külföldön.

'well, I was waiting for you - you may think - while you were away in foreign countries.'

Most occurrences of *elvan* exemplify the first meaning, accounting for 40% of tokens from the HNC2 corpus. Collocational analysis shows that *elvan* most frequently co-occurs with

the adverb *jól* 'well', in 407 cases. In the next large group of data, the verb carries the third meaning, followed by the second and the fourth functions with approximately equal shares in the corpus. The fifth meaning is the rarest to occur.

In the two corpus sentences from Nyitragerencsér, the meanings of *elvan* are as follows: 1. 'be far away', 2. 'pass time while having fun'. Although it would seem that both of these have also been documented in the HNC2, the 'be far away' dialectal meaning of *elvan* is not identical with the function attested in the national corpus. In the HNC2, the relevant interpretation is that a person is far away at the time of speaking (cf. (5a) and (5b)), whereas the dialectal example refers to the (stable) distance of some place. It is also interesting to observe that most of the examples from the HNC2 feature verbs with preverbs which do not profile spatial distance. By contrast, in the New Hungarian Dialectal Dictionary, spatial relations are important even in the first two meaning specifications.

### 3. Composite structure and frame of reference

Before we turn to the semantic analysis of the two corpus examples, it is necessary to give an overview of the notions of composite structures and frames of reference.

The preverb and the verb make up a composite structure, forming a linguistic unit (Langacker 1987: 57). with regard to conceptualisation, this structure is processed by the human mind holistically, since it represents an event with well-defined, closed boundaries (Wallace 1982). Features of composite structures can be described by reference to valency relations, including the following: 1. correspondences (as a function of overlaps between profiled substructures of the component structures), 2. profile determinance (the profile of a given component structure will also be the profile of the composite structure), 3. conceptual and phonological autonomy and dependence (with the autonomous component structure elaborating a profiled substructure of the dependent component structure), and 4. constituency (component structures are hierarchically combined in a given order, forming elaborate composite structures) (Langacker 1987: 277–326).

The main properties of Hungarian preverb + verb composite structures are summarised by Tolcsvai Nagy (2013: 188) as follows:

- a) the semantic pole of the composite structure is provided by the relation between the meanings of the two components, i.e. of the preverb and of the verb
- b) the composite structure profiles a process (temporal relation), unfolding with the participation of schematic figures
- c) the composite structure is based on partial correspondences and elaborative relations between the preverb and the verb; the composite structure functions as a linguistic unit whose internal structure is nevertheless transparent, and recognisable parts of the semantic structure make specific contributions to the meaning of the entire unit, or extensions thereof.

It has been remarked above that the meaning of *el* includes directionality. As a matter of principle, directionality can only be interpreted in the context of some space, with respect to something; therefore, it is important to consider the role of reference points in the analysis. Reference points are mentally construed spatial vantage points from which figures (or processes) are conceptualised. A reference point can be absolute, i.e. independent of the conceptualiser (e.g. geocentric, such as North) or relative, i.e. contingent on the conceptualiser's

perspective (perspective-centred, such as the human body). Heine (1997: 11–12) provides the following classification based on types of spatial orientation:

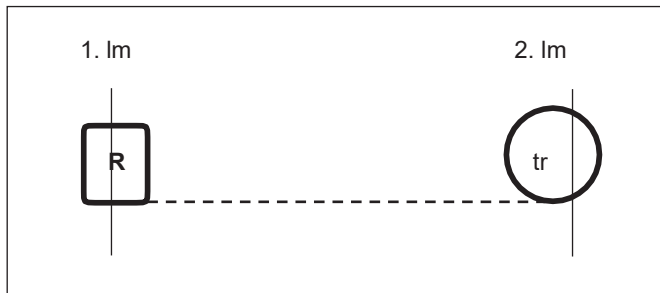
- a) deictic (the deictic reference point as the centre: the speaker's body),
- b) object (some physical object, primarily a human body serving as reference point)
- c) geographical object (the reference point is supplied by a point or structure in the physical environment, such as a mountain or a river)
- d) cardinal (the reference point as a centre is independent of the speaker and the speech situation; e.g. North, South).<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. The semantic structure of *elvan*

The corpus example in (6) below illustrates the verb *elvan* as used in the dialect of Nyitra-gerencsér, with a meaning that is undocumented in HNC2.<sup>4</sup>

- (6) Csák tőlünk elvá készű nágyonn :- Úlák /!/-:- pláne, há gyalog mēn á embēr.  
Csak tőlünk messze van nagyon – Újľak<sup>5</sup> – pláne, ha gyalog megy az ember.  
'It's just that it's very far from us – Újľak is – especially if one goes there by foot.'

In this example, the preverb has a static meaning, its function is to express spatial distance. Thus, *elvan* has the following meaning here: 'with respect to a place specified by the speaker, another place is (on a stable basis) at a distance.'



**Figure 1:** The semantic structure of the preverb *el* in sentence (6)

In this sentence, the semantic structure of *el* includes an abstract type of directionality, construed with summary scanning. In a physical space, the preverb maps the directionality of a schematic entity (SOMETHING), departing from the primary landmark (FROM SOMEWHERE) toward the secondary landmark (TO SOMEWHERE). In the atemporal SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema, the distance between the SOURCE (primary landmark) and the GOAL (secondary landmark) is in profile.

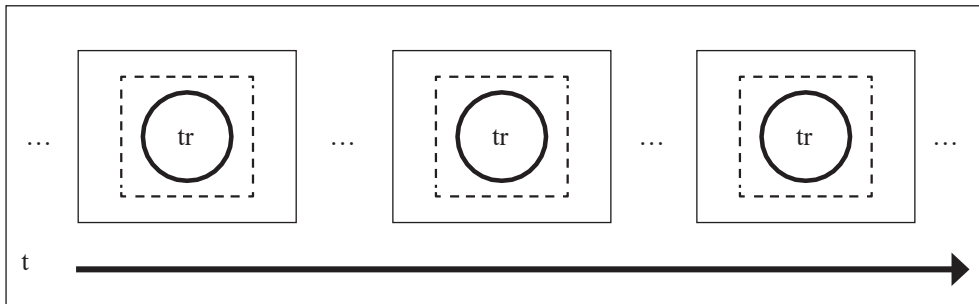
<sup>3</sup> The presentation of these types follows Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy (2013:198).

<sup>4</sup> This dialectal meaning of *elvan* can be identified in its collocations with *kéztől* 'from the hand'. The study of this pattern's idiomatic properties is beyond the scope of the present paper. It is important to note that this verb is still in use in the region, often without the adverbial *kéztől*.

<sup>5</sup> A municipality in Slovakia in the vicinity of the town of Nyitra (Nitra).

In addition to the path (representing the distance), the two spatial boundaries are also in the foreground of attention. The GOAL (secondary landmark) is provided by unbounded physical space. In the semantic structure, the SOURCE (the speaker's physical position, her 3D space) marks the referential and deictic centre (signalled by R). However, the directionality from the starting point to the endpoint (from the SOURCE to the GOAL) is abstracted, with the distant endpoint being foregrounded and receiving holistic conceptualisation: the trajector of the preverb (the entity) can be identified in the endpoint. This means that the preverb's function is to profile spatial distance: it has a static role in the mapping. In Figure 1, the schematic entity is marked by a circle, the spatial starting point and endpoint are represented by vertical lines, and the path is signalled by the horizontal line which represents the distance between the two boundaries.

In (6), the existential verb *van* profiles a process which does not involve change: the verb serves to designate the stable relation of the entity functioning as trajector with respect to the schematised space in which the landmark is situated (or which is specified by the speaker in the course of her speech act).



**Figure 2:** A schematic representation of the meaning of *van*

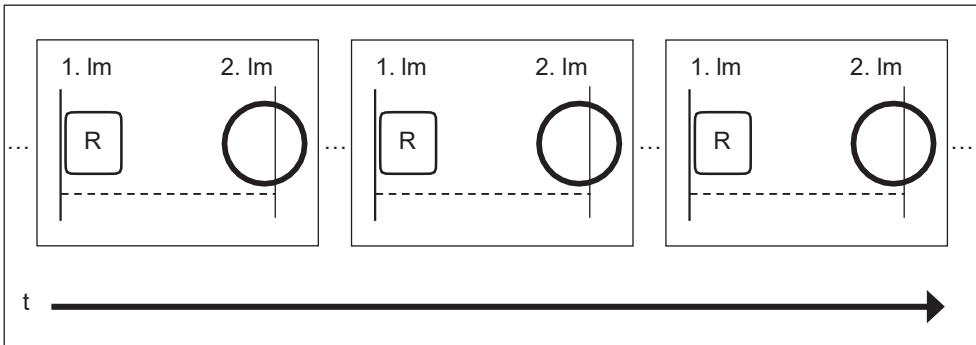
The existential verb designates an enduring state in some place, construed as temporally unbounded (in the immediate scope, time is conceptualised without starting and endpoints, as a succession of moments). In Langacker's theoretical framework, the verb can be described as follows:

- it designates a process (in which the trajector's position is stable), processed via sequential scanning; it is in continuous aspect; the construed process is temporally unbounded (lacking an endpoint)
- the relevant cognitive domain is physical space
- the trajector is some entity
- the event structure of the process: the trajector's continuous presence in a conceived physical space.

In the figure, squares represent three of the momentary states being processed via sequential scanning, while the arrow marks temporality. The circle corresponds to the schematic primary figure, or trajector, and the thin dotted line surrounding it signals the landmark's high

degree of schematicity.<sup>6</sup> In terms of conceptual content, existence may be bounded; however, it is construed in the immediate scope as lacking boundaries.<sup>7</sup>

In the composite structure of *elvan* as used in (6), the verb and the preverb mutually elaborate each other.



**Figure 3:** The semantic structure of *elvan* in its first meaning

The trajector of the existential verb corresponds to that of the preverb. The existential verb's trajector (a bounded region of some entity) is more specific than the preverb's one, therefore elaboration is directed at the preverb. The preverb's landmarks are schematic, but still more specific than that of the verb, thus the preverb functions in an elaborating capacity, and contributes two reference points to the semantic structure.

As a result of the elaborative relations, what gets profiled is the (stable) distance of the municipality of Újlak with respect to the reference point. The structure has a continuous meaning, firstly because the preverb does not imply directionality toward the endpoint, and secondly because the process profiled by the existential verb does not contain any change in the relationship between the schematic figures. The composite structure foregrounds distance (as a static configuration): the trajector (marked by the circle in Figure 3) is conceptualised in the secondary landmark specified by the preverb, in relation to the reference point residing with the primary landmark. The dotted line between the two landmarks serves to represent their distance schematically. The event structure can be described as follows: the time-stable distance of an entity (bounded physical space) with respect to a reference point. The stable, unchanging state profiled by the existential verb is put into the immediate scope via the preverb's semantic contribution (cf. Langacker 2008: 153–154).

In (7), the verb *elvan* has the meaning 'pass time by having fun'.

- (7) Mëggyig ëvännák ázonn à hitvány muzinn.  
 Meddig elvannak azon a hitvány mozin.  
 'How long they are passing time with that poor movie.'

<sup>6</sup> whether the existential verb indeed contains a landmark in its semantic structure requires further investigation.

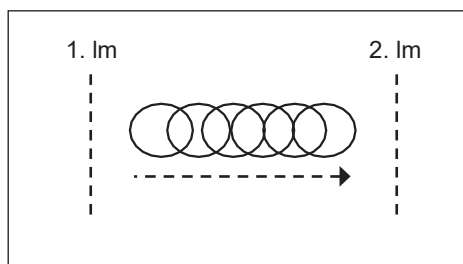
<sup>7</sup> "To say that something *exists* does not imply that it has always existed or that it always will but does portray the situation as constant during whatever is taken to be the relevant span of time (the temporal immediate scope)" (Langacker 2008: 147).



In its occurrence in (7), *elvan* does not profile spatial distance, but rather an enduring activity going on for a long time. In this example also, the deictic and referential centre lies with the speaker, the profiled process is occurring at a distance from her. However, in this case, distance is signalled by the grounded, case-marked nominal (*azon a mozin* 'on that movie') rather than the preverb.<sup>8</sup>

Within the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema activated by *el*, this time the PATH (summarily scanned) and the directionality are foregrounded: the preverb expresses the direction inherent in the process (this is consequently a dynamic schema as opposed to the static function seen in (6)). However, what is important with regard to directionality is not the reaching of the endpoint but rather the direction itself and the mapped section of the route. This use exemplifies the case when the SOURCE-PATH-GOAL schema has a metaphorical spatial structure, owing to directionality.<sup>9</sup> whereas in the previous example, the preverb had an exclusively spatial meaning, this time the spatial structure is transferred metaphorically into the domain of time, and consequently has both temporal starting and endpoints (which, however, stay in the background).

The two temporal boundaries are abstracted, and are in the background of the overall semantic structure. Although in the the primary meaning of *el*, directionality and temporality (perfective function) are closely intertwined, this time the profiling of duration becomes prominent, yielding continuous aspect. This follows from schematisation (with the speaker profiling particular elements of the schema in specific usage events) and also from the conceptual content of the verb.<sup>10</sup> Figure 4 below provides a schematic representation of the preverb's meaning in (7). Thin dotted lines correspond to the highly schematic landmarks, whereas the dotted arrow marks the PATH (indicating duration) and directionality of the process.



**Figure 4:** The semantic structure of the preverb *el* in (7)

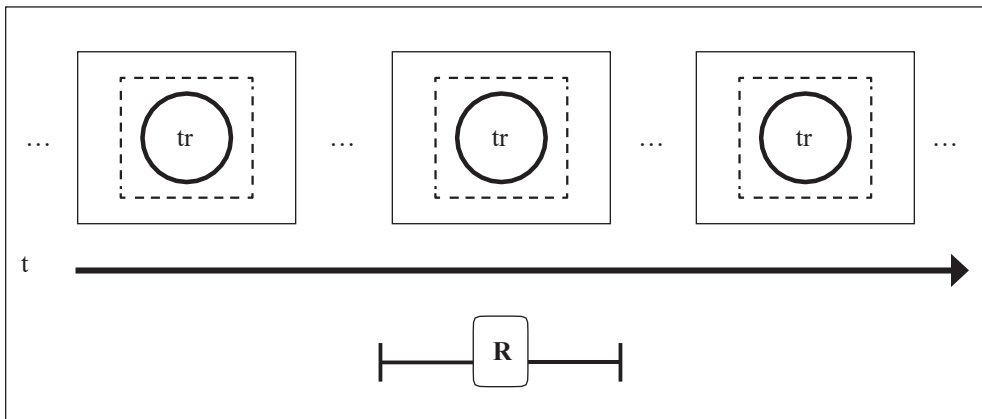
<sup>8</sup> According to data in HNC2, examples of *elvan* with the meaning of 'have fun' do not necessarily include 'distance' in their semantics (see examples (3a,b,c,d)), and the latter semantic feature is restricted to other contexts (cf. (5a,b)). Example (7) may partially involve directionality; however, I would suggest that its main function is the expression of continuous aspect here. Directionality is (or may be) explicit owing to the dependent *azon a mozin* 'on that movie', and may be interpreted in both temporal and spatial dimensions.

<sup>9</sup> The temporal meaning associated with *el* is shown by the pattern's collocation with temporal interrogative pronouns. The construct *meddig elvannak* (where *meddig* literally means 'until what time', and *elvannak* is the 3rd person plural form of *elvan*) has the meaning 'how long they are having fun'.

<sup>10</sup> This continuous aspect is obviously different from the unboundedness associated with the verb lacking a preverb, and also from the aspect of constructs involving inversion (with the preverb following rather than preceding the verb). Since a sufficiently refined analysis of continuous aspect is not yet available, I will use the term "continuous aspect" in this paper. I do not consider the the notion of boundedness as used by Kiefer-Ladányi (2000: 465–483) to be adequate, as boundaries have a perfectivising function, and here it is precisely the enduring nature of the process that is being foregrounded.

Example (7) features an even more abstract meaning of the existential verb (whose basic meaning is already highly abstract): it provides a generic expression of an activity spanning a length of time.<sup>11</sup> The process is construed as continuous (with the unboundedness of the activity/state being in the focus of attention). In this sentence, the use of a verb with such abstract meaning (in other words the lack of specific construal of the activity<sup>12</sup>) may be motivated by the fact that the speaker is directing attention at a process unfolding without changes, with the time-stable activity of the primary figure (trajector) receiving prominence. (Schematicity follows precisely from the fact that in the event structure of *elvant*, characteristic phases of the process cannot be defined). The time of the speech act (or the time experienced/imagined by the conceptualiser) may serve as a metaphorical landmark (reference point).<sup>13</sup>

The duration of the process denoted by the existential verb is foregrounded via the use of the preverb. The abstract, backgrounded temporal boundaries place the abstract process into the immediate scope in such a way that its duration transgresses the time of speaking. The trajector of the composite structure is elaborated by the verb, and the metaphorical landmarks, having performed their function of placing the process into the immediate scope, are out of profile, thus attention is directed at the enduring nature of the abstract process. The overall structure has a continuous meaning. The backgrounded reference point (R) is the time of speaking, it is bounded (as represented by the line segment). The profiled activity is construed as continuous with respect to this reference point. The semantic structure of *elvan* in (7) is schematically represented by Figure 5 below.



**Figure 5:** The semantic structure of *elvan* in its second meaning

<sup>11</sup> The meaning 'have fun' is another highly lexicalised meaning, which is presumably secondary with respect to more general meanings (such as 'existence' and 'making a living').

<sup>12</sup> In the speech act of (7), possible specific construals could have involved the meanings 'watching a film' or 'having fun'.

<sup>13</sup> In the corpus example, the film's precise duration may serve as a reference point. The time of speaking (time of conceptualisation) coincides with the time expressed by the existential verb, therefore the reference point cannot be visually represented in the figure.

## 5. Summary

This paper made an attempt at the detailed semantic characterisation of a lexeme which had not received such description before. The framework of cognitive semantics is well-suited to the exploration of highly abstract semantic structures, allowing one to describe the two meanings of *elvan* found in the dialect of Nyitraegerencsér, with the associated differences in construal. whereas in sentence (1) the 'presence, stable state' meaning of the existential verb is activated as a function of the preverb *el*, the second example profiles a meaning of 'abstract activity' in the immediate scope. Both constructions involve continuous aspect, which, however, is conceptualised in two different ways. In (7), the fact that the abstract activity has temporal starting and endpoints remains implicit, and the preverb's meaning includes the function of continuous aspect. By contrast, in (6), the preverb *el* has no influence on the temporality expressed by the verb *van* 'be'. The two examples also illustrate the schemas coded in the preverb's meaning: (6) involves a static, while (7) a dynamic schema. These schemas are activated as a function of context. Although in conceptualisation, the preverb and the verb are processed as a single unit, the proposed semantic description is motivated on methodological grounds.

Particular meanings may undergo lexicalisation in a given language community, as a result of frequent use. It would be beneficial for dialectology, but also for Hungarian linguistics more generally, if further dialectal words received similar detailed semantic descriptions. An extensive, corpus-based case study of the existential verb (including *elvan*) seems to be especially necessary, given the uncertainties surrounding this verb and the constructions it occurs in. Such a description allows one to trace and understand the process of lexicalisation.

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