

***Aspect and Stativity in Hungarian:
From General Principles to Language-Specific Phenomena,
Boglárka Németh
– Review –***

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There is no doubt that reference to states and events is a pervasive feature of human thought and language. But how is such reference made available through the syntactic and lexical resources of human speech?

On the one hand, the term “aspect” serves to distinguish such things as whether the beginning, the middle or the end of an event is being referred to; whether the event is complete or incomplete; whether it is a single or a repeated event, etc. This is known as *viewpoint* (or *grammatical*) aspect. On the other hand, the same term is employed to refer to the semantic differences inherent in the meaning of the verbs themselves – verbs tend to describe states or events, i.e. activities, accomplishments or achievements – causing them to have different interpretations or to have restrictions when combined with aspect markers or with various time adverbials. This is known as *situation* (or *lexical*) aspect. That these two components of the aspectual system interact with each other has been recognized by many scholars, most notably by Carlota Smith who states that “the two-component theory provides a principled approach to the relation between the situation type (event or state) and viewpoint (perfective or imperfective) of a sentence.”¹ It is this approach which is embraced in the volume under review here.

The monograph entitled *Aspect and Stativity in Hungarian: From General Principles to Language-Specific Phenomena*² is a welcome sequel of the author’s doctoral dissertation written in Hungarian. The present study deals with the aspectual system of Hungarian, which proves to be a highly fascinating domain. Its aims are two-fold: on the one hand, it proposes to elaborate an adequate two-component model of aspect applicable to Hungarian and its aspect system; on the

¹ Carlota Smith, *The Parameter of Aspect* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991), xiv.

² Boglárka Németh, *Aspect and Stativity in Hungarian: From General Principles to Language-Specific Phenomena* (Kolozsvár [Cluj-Napoca]: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2012), 152 p. ISBN 978-606-8178-59-2.

other hand, it wishes to explore the problem of stativity with special reference to this Finno-Ugric language. Although for linguists with superficial or scarce theoretical knowledge of aspect both of these subjects might seem to be well-documented in the vast literature, the present study proves that there are still unexplored facets of this field of linguistics. This may be the first focused description of this particular section of Hungarian aspectology.

The organization of this book follows the standard dissertation template.

Chapter I is a very brief statement of the central topics to be examined, the theoretical questions raised by the study, the appropriateness of the theme under investigation, the novelty of the proposed approach, as well as the outline of the remaining chapters.

Chapter II starts with the presentation of the main moments that marked the development of viewpoint and situation aspect and the conclusions that were reached. Although all works relevant to the author's framework are mentioned, one approach – that of Carlota Smith – stands out not only by the amount of space allotted to discussing it, but more so by repeated citations in the remaining part of the chapter. And this needs no justification, as the analysis put forth by her, the definitions given by her, the theoretical generalizations and the observations made in her study – while debatable and inconclusive from certain points of view – nevertheless set our author on the right path towards building an aspectual model for Hungarian.

This part of the chapter offers an essential theoretical introduction to the aspectual system of Hungarian. The author does not only present analyses as they appear in the literature, but she gives concise argumentations explaining why certain approaches raise questions and why several definitions are problematic. However, instead of a quite general overview, more exigent readers would have expected a critical review of these approaches, commenting on the advantages and shortcomings of each of them.

Based on previous approaches to aspectology, the next section of the chapter elaborates an asymmetric two-component model of aspect. The author refutes Smith's claim that "the aspectual meaning of a sentence results from interaction between two *independent* aspectual components"¹ (our emphasis) and she proposes that these two levels are not (and cannot be) independent coordinate systems, as "viewpoint aspect can change the (lexically or compositionally encoded) situation aspect of the phrase."² She argues that viewpoint aspect is an important subsystem in the compositional marking of aspect, thus she assumes a hierarchical relation between the two levels. That these two distinct, but dependent aspectual levels are in a hierarchical relation, explains the attributive "asymmetric".

Moving from general principles to language-specific phenomena, the last section of the chapter applies Smith's modified asymmetric two-component model of aspectuality to the Hungarian aspectual system. In light of the major claims made in the previous section, special emphasis is laid on the role that Hungarian viewpoint

¹ Smith, *The Parameter of Aspect*, xiv.

² Németh, *Aspect and Stativity in Hungarian: From General Principles to Language-Specific Phenomena*, 45.

categories play in determining the compositionally encoded situation aspect of phrases or sentences.

Chapter III, the most substantial part of the monograph is dedicated to stative predicates and constructions. We know that the most fundamental distinction between types of single situations – distinction originally drawn by Lakoff in his dissertation¹ – is between states/stative predicates and non-states/non-stative predicates, i.e. activities, accomplishments, achievements and, more recently, semelfactives. As known at least since Vendler's seminal paper² and especially Dowty's much cited work,³ the division of predicates or verbs into these four (or rather five) groups is determined by a number of tests that are well-defined in the linguistic literature. But in spite of this (apparently) straightforward distinction, these aspectual classes have not been in the centre of attention in an equal manner. As opposed to non-stative predicates which have been the source of a large variety of debates for a remarkably extended period of time, the role that stative predicates might play in the aspectual built-up of the sentences they are part of has largely been left out of these debates. As, generally speaking, the topic of stativity is a rather neglected area in the research on aspectual categories and states in Hungarian have not been (exhaustively) addressed so far, Németh intends to investigate the main features of stativity and the problematic questions related to this category of situation aspect, with particular interest in Hungarian.

First, she takes a look at the most relevant characteristics assigned to the category of stative predicates and offers a systematized presentation of these features. The discussion revolves around features like homogeneity, inherent persistency, non-agentivity and non-alternation. Then, she employs some widely-known and lesser-known tests of stativity and stativity features to verify these four features. She digs deeply into the problem of these tests, devoting separate subsections to tests based on pragmatic principles and interval semantics, as well as well-formedness tests based on syntactic and semantic distribution patterns. The detailed discussion is followed by clear summaries of the relevant tests and unilateral criteria of stativity. These help the author conclude that not all stative predicates share exactly the same characteristics, hence, these predicates can (and should) be classified based on the above-mentioned features. This means that we can (and should) talk about different degrees of stativity: process predicates form a continuum or a hierarchy ranging from pure stative predicates which bear (at least) three out of four subfeatures of stativity to pure process predicates which bear none of the four subfeatures. Between these two poles we find the rest of the predicates that display mixed properties of the two prototypical classes. These are the predicates which bear two or one of the four subfeatures.

¹ George Lakoff, "On the Nature of Syntactic Irregularity" (PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1965).

² Zeno Vendler, *Linguistics in Philosophy* (Ithaca/NY: Cornell University Press, 1974 [1967]), 97–121.

³ David Dowty, *Word Meaning and Montague Grammar: The Semantics of Verbs and Times in Generative Semantics and in Montague's PTQ* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979).

In the rest of the chapter the author discusses stative and eventive resultative constructions. This is an exclusively aspectual analysis of this construction type, an approach which has been underrepresented in favour of syntactic perspectives focusing on argument structure. The author demonstrates that both resultatives are aspectual operators, but with different functions. As expected, in the description of these constructions the author applies, again, the two-level approach.

The monograph ends with a section of summaries to the investigation and a proposal for further research into related phenomena.

The author's arguments are coherent and the analysis given is valid and convincing. The arguments are sustained with a wealth of examples mostly from Hungarian, but also from other languages (especially English).

Due to the amount of information and illustrative data, what is extremely helpful is the large number of tables summarizing the facts. These help the reader have a general overview of the described phenomena and keep track of what material has been covered.

In general, *Aspect and Stativity in Hungarian: From General Principles to Language-Specific Phenomena* is a valuable contribution to Hungarian aspect. Like many dissertations before it, it seems that Boglárka Németh's main task has been to apply notions of aspect worked out by other linguists, as well as to validate grammaticalization paths proposed by others. This, however, does not reduce the novelty of her treatment, since it sheds light on new linguistic phenomena. This study will probably promote further discussions.

The earlier versions of the present volume – the author's doctoral dissertation and one of its revised and published versions – are available only in Hungarian, as a result of which they might be unjustly neglected by those linguists who do not read in this language. I believe that this English edition makes this work available to a truly international linguistic readership.