SPECIFICITY, INDIVIDUATION AND ASPECT

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0. PLAN

1. What is it to be specific?
2. Specificity and aspect
3. Hungarian ‘definiteness effect’ verbs

1. SPECIFICITY

Specificity does not necessarily involve ‘discourse-linkedness’:

(1) a. I forgot to write a contract.
   *’The was no contract I wrote’

b. Kirúgtak, mert nem írtam meg egy szerződést.
   fired-they-me because not wrote-I PREF a contract-ACC
   ‘They fired me because I didn’t write a contract’
   *’They fired me because I wrote no contract’

The specificity of an entity does not imply that either the speaker or the addressee is supposed to be ‘familiar’ with it, either:

(2) The fact is, Benno said, he had overheard a dialogue between Adelmo and Berengar in which Berengar, referring to a secret Adelmo was asking him to reveal, proposed a vile barter, which even the most innocent reader can imagine.

(3) Specificity

A reference to an entity is specific iff it presupposes the possibility of the existence of the entity. By the ‘possibility’ of its existence we mean the existence of an intentional eventuality the actualization of which yields the coming into existence of the entity in question, i.e., an intentional entity the actualization of which could be the entity in question.
2. SPECIFICITY AND ASPECT

(4) a. — Megírtam egy levelet
   PREF-wrote-I a letter-ACC
   E.g., ‘I wrote one of the letters’
   — OK Melyik levelet?
      which letter-ACC
      ‘Which letter?’

b. — írtam egy levelet
   wrote-I a letter-ACC
   ‘I wrote a letter’
   — # Melyik levelet?
      which letter-ACC

(The semantics/pragmatics of which probably implies that the addressee is supposed to provide a different description from the one the speaker knows about.)

(5) Szabolcsi’s illustration of prefixed vs. prefixless DE-verbs

   a. Szerveztem egy konferenciát.
      organized-I a conference-ACC
      ‘I organized a conference’

   b. Megszerveztem egy konferenciát.
      PREF-organized-I a conference-ACC
      ‘I organized a conference’

(The role of the verbal prefix is not perfectivization (in this case), but to claim that an eventuality culminates and, as a consequence, an intentional entity gets actualized.)

2. SPECIFICITY AND ASPECT

Why is it that the theme in an imperfective predicate (of the type under scrutiny) has to be specific, and if the predicate is perfective, it is either ‘pre-specific’ or ‘post-specific’?

(6) Process(\(w, \text{par}, \text{th}, P\)) \(\Leftrightarrow_{\text{def}}\)

\[
\text{STATE/LOC(\text{par}, \text{th})} \& \text{CAUS}(P, \text{th, par}) \& P(\text{th, w}) \&
\forall w_1, w_2 \subseteq w[P(\text{th, w}_1) \& P(\text{th, w}_2) \& \pi(w_1, w_2) \rightarrow \text{par(\text{th, w}_1) \leq \text{par(\text{th, w}_2})}].
\]

(7) TelicProcess(\(w, \text{par}, \text{th}, P, C\)) \(\Leftrightarrow_{\text{def}}\)

\[
\exists w_c \subseteq w
\forall w' [\pi(w_c, w') \rightarrow \pi(w, w')] \&
\text{C(\text{th, w}_c)} \& \forall w'' \subseteq w[\pi(w'', w_c) \rightarrow \neg C(\text{th, w''})].
\]

Expression of the theme: When the process is telic, we may leave the affected theme unspecified (or incorporated, if you wish), and the direct object may express whatever obtains at the culmination point (effected theme):

(8) a. I was carrying/carried the table (into the room/towards the room).

b. I was making/made (this stuff into) a kite.

(9) a. I was baking/baked (some stuff into) a cake.

b. I was baking/baked a cake (into ??).
3. HUNGARIAN ‘DEFINITENESS EFFECT’ VERBS

When prefixless, they have to be interpreted imperfectively whenever their theme is specific:

(10) a. Írtam egy levelet  
    wrote-I a letter-ACC  
    ‘I wrote a letter (non-specific)’  
    ‘I was writing a letter (specific)’

b. Írtam a levelet  
    wrote-I the letter-ACC  
    *‘I wrote the letter’  
    ‘I was writing the letter’

What has been said in the above explains this (for the contribution of the prefix, see above).

Two problems:
1. ‘Neutralization’ facts…
2. What verbs exactly are like this?

3.1. ‘Neutralization effects’

Restriction of the perfective interpretation to non-specific themes ‘suspended’ when focus, negation, quantification, subordination is present:

(11) a. [fTEGNAP] írtam a levelet  
    yesterday wrote-I the letter-ACC  
    ‘It’s yesterday that I wrote the letter’

b. [fÍRTAM] a levelet  
    wrote-I the letter-ACC  
    ‘I WROTE the letter [rather than, e.g., copied it]’

c. a fiú, aki a levelet írta  
    the boy who the letter-ACC wrote-3SG  
    ‘the boy who wrote the letter’

d. *háromszor szerveztem egy konferenciát  
    three-times organized-I a conference-ACC  

Explanation: Separate construction involving perfective interpretation.

3.2. Which verbs exactly?

Verbs of creation, consumption, performing etc.; practically any verb with an affected theme. Condition: some special relation must hold in the resulting state between the theme and some beneficient:
(12) a. l uptam [magamnak] egy biciglit
    stole-I myself a bike-ACC
    ‘I stole a bike’

b. hoztam  egy asztalt
    brought-I a table-ACC
    ‘I brought a table’
    [i.e., anything that will serve as a table for sy]

c. Lőttem egy vadkacsát
    shot-I a wild duck-ACC
    ‘I shot a wild duck’

d. mostam (magamnak) egy autót
    washed-I myself-DAT a car-ACC
    c. ‘I washed myself a car’