

# Falling in paradise: verbs, preverbs, and reduplication in Hungarian

Christopher J. Piñón  
Stanford University

Syntax Workshop  
21 May 1991

*This is about how one might analyze a small piece of Hungarian grammar to get the behavior of preverbs to fall into place. A preverb is roughly the equivalent of the English particle, though the inventory of preverbs in Hungarian is much larger than that of particles in English. All Hungarian preverbs are separable; they are "preverbs" precisely because their canonical position is immediately before the verb. The following presentation takes the form of a narration which has four main parts: crawling, standing, falling, out.*

## 1. Crawling: the early perspective

A few years after the ominous days of 1956, Hungarian linguistics circles had the opportunity to set their worries aside for a bit to read an impressive book which just then appeared. This book, written by Katalin J. Soltész and entitled *Az ősi magyar igekötők* [The ancient Hungarian preverbs] (1959), was the first reasonably exhaustive work to so carefully and insightfully analyze the meanings, uses, and syntax of the oldest preverbs in Hungarian. In so doing, however, (and yet this is the book's virtue!), it raises many more questions than were either answerable or even clearly askable at that time. I want to narrow in and address one such question her work raises.

It is chapter 10 (*Az összetett igekötő* [The compound preverb]) of her book that concerns us here. In her view, Hungarian has known four types of compound preverbs. They are:

- (1) a. the **twin** preverb: el-ki 'away-out', el-be 'away-in', el-fel 'away-up',  
el-le 'away-down', etc.
- b. the **oppositional** preverb: ki-be 'out-in', fel-le 'up-down', (le-fel 'down-up'),  
fel-alá 'up-under' (also: fel s alá), össze-vissza 'together-back', etc.
- c. the **reduplicated** preverb: meg-meg 'PERF-PERF', ki-ki 'out-out',  
be-be 'in-in', etc.
- d. the **compound directional** preverb: ki-felé 'out-towards', be-felé 'in-towards',  
fel-felé 'up-towards', le-felé 'down-towards'

The fourth type, (1d), will not preoccupy us here, for note that it is the only one which is composed not of two preverbs, but rather of a preverb plus the postposition *felé* (e.g. *a ház felé* 'towards the house'). J. Soltész remarks (178) that *felé* gives the preverb back its (often) lost adverbial sense. It is typically used to express imperfectivity:

- (2) a. János épp ment ki-felé a szobából, amikor Mari  
 John just went out-towards the room-out when Mary  
 vissza·hívta.  
 back-called  
 'John was just going out of the room when Mary called him back'
- b. Mari épp fejezte be-felé a vizsgát, amikor a  
 Mary just finished in-towards the exam when the  
 tanára vissza·kérte.  
 teacher.her back-requested  
 'Mary was just finishing the exam when her teacher asked for it back'

We now turn to the remaining three types of compound preverbs. The first of these, the twin preverb, no longer exists in Hungarian. Standard descriptive grammars (e.g. Tompa, ed. 1961) do not even mention it. Yet there is ample evidence that it did exist in Old Hungarian:

- (3) a. el-ki-bocsát 'out-send', el-ki-megy 'out-go', el-ki-von 'out-pull'  
el-be-lép 'in-step', el-be-rekeszt 'in-conclude', el-be-száll 'in-embark'  
el-föl-gyógyít 'up-cure', el-föl-nő 'up-grow', el-fel-ül 'up-sit'  
el-le-rak 'down-set', el-le-tör 'down-break' el-le-vet 'down-put'  
el-szét-szor 'asunder-scatter'
- b. el-ki-ment az apai lakból  
 out-went the father's hearth.out
- c. el-be-menekszik a várba  
 in-flees the castle.in
- d. Erős ital után esze el-hagyá, de a  
 strong drink after mind.his away-left but the  
 harmadnapra el-fel-gyógyítá.  
 third.day.by up-cured  
 'After strong drink his mind left him, but by the third day it cured him'

- e. Ábrahám az szamár hátáról az terhet el-le-raká.  
 Abraham the ass back.its.from the load.ACC down-set  
 'Abraham set the load down from the ass's back'

What does el actually mean in such compounds? J. Soltész (174) claims that it emphasizes the direction of moving away, i.e. distancing. A more recent commentator, D. Máta (1989: 167), is more explicit in stating that el developed into a degree adverb meaning something like 'very, extremely, wholly'. She notes that other archaic forms support this reasoning:

- (4) el-régen 'very long ago', el-ritkán 'very rarely', el néha néha 'very sometimes', etc.

Turning now to the oppositional preverb, we might ask about its characterization. J. Soltész (175) observes that this preverb can only be formed from two preverbs with opposing strong directional meanings. This preverb was rare in Old Hungarian; its use has spread since then (D. Máta: 168):

- (5) a. ki-be-jár 'out-in-go', ki-be-rakogat 'out-in-put', ki-be-csuk 'out-in-close'  
fel-le-jár 'up-down-go', fel-le-szaladgál 'up-down-hurry',  
le-fel-szállong 'down-up-fly about'  
fel-alá járkal 'up-under-roam', fel-alá sétál 'up-under-stroll',  
fel-alá futkos 'up-under rush' (perhaps more common with: fel s alá)  
össze-vissza beszél 'together-back speak', össze-vissza hazudik  
 'together-back lie', össze-vissza ténfereg 'together-back loaf'
- b. Mari ki-be-rakogatja a kismackót a játékházba.  
 Mary out-in-puts the little.bear.ACC the playhouse.in  
 'Mary places the little bear in and out of the playhouse'
- c. A gyerekek fel-le-szaladgáltak a játszótéren.  
 the children up-down-hurried the play.ground.on  
 'The children hurried up and down the playground'
- d. János fel s alá sétalt a part mentén  
 John up-under-strolled the shore side.its.on  
 a menyasszonyával.  
 the fiancée.his.with  
 'John strolled up and down the side of the shore with his fiancée'

- e. A mészáros össze-vissza hasogatta a ruháját.  
 the butcher together-back cleaved the clothes.his.ACC  
 'The butcher cleaved his clothes all up'

The meaning of the oppositional preverb is clear enough intuitively: it denotes an action's two contradictory directional movements.

Finally, consider (1c), the reduplicated preverb. I provide a variety of examples:

- (6) a. A kismackó meg-meg-állt, s körül-nézett.  
 the little.bear PERF-PERF-stopped and around-looked  
 'The little bear stopped occasionally and looked around'

- b. Át-át-lebben a fórumnyilatkozaton a néma  
 across-across-flutters the forum.declaration the mute  
 sokaság fogalma. Vajon mekkora az?  
 crowd notion.of whether how.big that  
 (*Magyar Nemzet*, 22.II.90: 5)

'The notion *mute crowd* keeps fluttering across the forum declaration. Just how large is it?'

- c. A fel-fel-lángoló nemzeti elégedetlenség Moldáviától a  
 the up-up-flaming national dissatisfaction Moldavia.from the  
 Baltikumig nehéz helyzetbe hozza a  
 Baltics.to difficult situation.in brings the  
 szovjet elnököt.  
 Soviet president.ACC

'The national dissatisfaction flaming up capriciously from Moldavia to the Baltics is bringing the Soviet president into a difficult situation'

- d. Föl-föl-dobott kő, földedre hullva,  
 up-up-thrown stone earth.your.onto dropped  
 Kicsi országom, újra meg újra  
 small country.my again and again  
 Haza-jön a fiad. (Endre Ady: *A föl-földobott kő*)  
 home-comes the son.your

'As a stone thrown up irregularly, dropped onto your earth,  
 my small country, again and again / Your son comes home'

- e. Az igeikötő "külön, önálló szóalakként való  
 the preverb separate independent word.form.as being  
 elő-elő-fordulása az önálló szói  
 fore-fore-appearance.its the independent word  
 jelleget fonetikai tekintetben kétségtelenül igazolja ..."  
 character.ACC phonetic respect.in undoubtedly justifies  
 (Tompa, ed.(1961: 263))  
 'The preverb's separate, frequent appearance as an independent word form  
 undoubtedly justifies the independent word character phonetically'
- f. Már egy hete csak a mamára / gondolok mindig  
 already one week.for only the mom.on think.I always  
 meg-meg-állva (Attila József: *Mama*)  
 PERF-PERF-standing  
 'For already one week I having been thinking about mama, stopping  
 from time to time'

As is evident from (6), the reduplicated preverb denotes an irregular iteration of the event denoted by the verb. Although the reduplicated preverb is not attested in Old Hungarian, it does not follow that it's a recent development. On the contrary, J. Soltész (142) views the reduplication of words as an ancient device for the expression of repetition in either space or time (e.g. olykor-olykor 'sometimes-sometimes = once in a blue moon', külön-külön 'separate-separate', alig-alig 'barely-barely', etc.). Nevertheless, Pais (1961: 269) claims that the first attested reduplicated preverb stems from 1651:

- (7) Az teremtett természetet az ő keduekért  
 the created disposition.ACC the his spirits.for  
 el-el-térengette  
 away-away-distracted(?).he

## 2. Standing: the problem

Recall that I said at the outset that all (simple) preverbs in Hungarian are separable. More specifically, every preverb can potentially appear in three word orders. These are, after the traditional nomenclature, the following:

- (8) a. **straight order:** Mari ki-ment a szobából.  
 Mary out-went the room.out  
 'Mary went out of the room'

- b. **reversed order:** Csak Mari ment ki a szobából.  
'Only Mary went out of the room'
- c. **broken order:** Mari ki is ment a szobából.  
also  
'Mary also went out of the room'

Straight order is the default order—it kicks in whenever neither reversed nor broken order is forced. Reversed order is forced whenever there is a focussed constituent in the sentence. Since Hungarian has a syntactic focus position which is preverbal (cf. É. Kiss 1987), any focussed constituent must occupy this position. For present purposes, three focus test items are sufficient. The first is the csak-phrase, exhibited in (8b); the second is Wh-words and third, negation:

- (9) a. Mari mikor ment ki a szobából?  
Mary when went out the room.out  
'When did Mary go out of the room?'
- b. Mari nem ment ki a szobából.  
Mary NEG went out the room.out
- c. \*Mari mikor ki·ment a szobából?
- d. \*Mari nem ki·ment a szobából.
- e. \*Csak Mari ki·ment a szobából. (cf. (8b))

As for broken order, whenever the clitic is 'also' modifies a verb with a preverb, it must intervene between the two:

- (10) \*Mari ki·ment is a szobából. (cf. (8c))

A reasonable expectation is that the compound preverbs behave exactly like simple preverbs with respect to these word orders. Take the twin preverb first. Although such examples are extremely rare, reversed order for the twin preverb is attested (J. Soltész: 175):

- (11) a. Meny el ki the, es mynd az neep. (imperative)  
go away out you and all the people
- b. El megiek el be.  
away go.I away in

Such examples very clearly demonstrate that the twin preverb could appear in reversed order. I could not find any examples of the twin preverb in broken order. This in itself is not surprising, for broken order is much rarer than reversed order. In the absence of any reason to suppose otherwise, I will assume that it was able to appear in broken order as well.

The oppositional preverb similarly can occur in postverbal position (cf. (5b-e)):

- (12) a. **Ki** rakosgatja ki-be a kismackót a játékházba?  
 'Who is placing the little bear in and out of the playhouse?'
- b. A gyerekek **nem** szaladgáltak fel-le a játszótéren.  
 'The children **didn't** hurry up and down the playground'
- c. **Csak János** fel s alá sétalt a part mentén  
 a menyasszonyával.  
 'Only **John** strolled up and down the side of the shore with his fiancée'
- d. A mészáros **nem** hasogatta össze-vissza a ruháját.  
 'The butcher **didn't** cleave his clothes all up'

The focus contexts in (12) force reversed order for the oppositional preverb, as expected. The fact that the oppositional preverb is well-formed in broken order lends credence to the idea that the twin preverb was well-formed in this order as well. I modify (12b) as an example:

- (13) A gyerekek fel-le **is** szaladgáltak a játszótéren.  
 'The children also hurried up and down the playground'

The problem, however, arises when we inspect the reduplicated preverb for reversed order. Surprisingly, it cannot appear in reversed order:

- (14) a. \*A kismackó **nem** állt meg-meg az erdőben.  
 the little.bear NEG stopped PF-PF the woods.in  
 'The little bear **didn't** stop occasionally in the woods'
- b. \***Csak a néma sokaság fogalma** lebben át-át a  
 fórumnyilatkozaton.  
 'Only the notion *mute crowd* keeps fluttering across the forum declaration.'

- c. \*A nemzeti elégedetlenség **mikor** lángolt fel-fel korábban  
 the national dissatisfaction when flamed up-up earlier  
 a Szovjet Unió történetében?  
 the Soviet Union history.its.in  
 'When did national dissatisfaction flame up here and there earlier in the  
 history of the Soviet Union?'

The phenomenon illustrated by (14) is completely general for reduplicated preverbs. Since they do not tolerate reversed order, no focussed constituent can appear in clauses with a reduplicated preverb. Incidentally, (14) remains bad even if the reduplicated preverb appears in straight order.

Interestingly, broken order is possible with the reduplicated preverb, even if extremely rare. J. Soltész (178) in fact uncovers one such example from Hungarian literature:

- (15) forgatva kecsesen s meg-meg is libbentve  
 (Tamási: *Szegénység*)  
 rotating gracefully and PF-PF also fluttering

The problem can now be stated: why should the reduplicated preverb be bad in reversed order when it is good in broken order? In other words, how does the reduplicated preverb differ from the other two compound preverbs?

### 3. Falling: an analysis

The task is threefold. The first part is to give an analysis of the three word orders for preverbs. The second is to argue for some decisive difference between the reduplicated preverb on the one hand, and the twin and oppositional preverbs on the other. The third is to relate the analysis of word orders to this decisive difference.

Allow me to state at the outset my hypothesis regarding the decisive difference between these two types of compound preverbs. It is quite simply the following: the twin and oppositional preverbs fall in the lexicon, i.e. there are morphological units like [el-ki], [el-be], [ki-be], [fel-le], etc. in the lexicon; the reduplicated preverb is not present in the lexicon, i.e. there are NO units [meg-meg], [át-át], [ki-ki], etc. in the lexicon: it falls in the syntax. The substance of this hypothesis will be made clearer in due time.

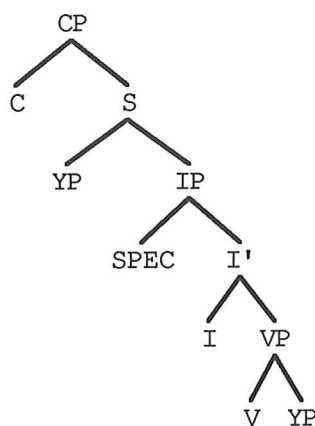
Returning to the first part of the task, let us consider what an analysis of the three preverb orders might look like. Analyses of the syntax of focus in Hungarian are abundant (cf. Horvath 1986, Farkas 1986, É. Kiss 1987, Brody 1990), though none of these will fully suit our purpose. This is because they all deal exclusively with the



straight and reversed orders of the preverb, and totally leave out the phenomenon of broken order (cf. (8c)), an unfortunate omission if we wish to understand why the reduplicated preverb can appear in broken order (cf. (15)) but not in reversed order. Moreover, none of these authors even touch upon the question of compound preverbs—their analyses do not take such data into account.

For these reasons I will forge forward with a way of looking at things which shares select (but not all) features of previous analyses of Hungarian syntax together with some new features of my own. In particular, the basic sentence structure which I will be assuming is the following:

(16) **Basic Hungarian sentence structure:**

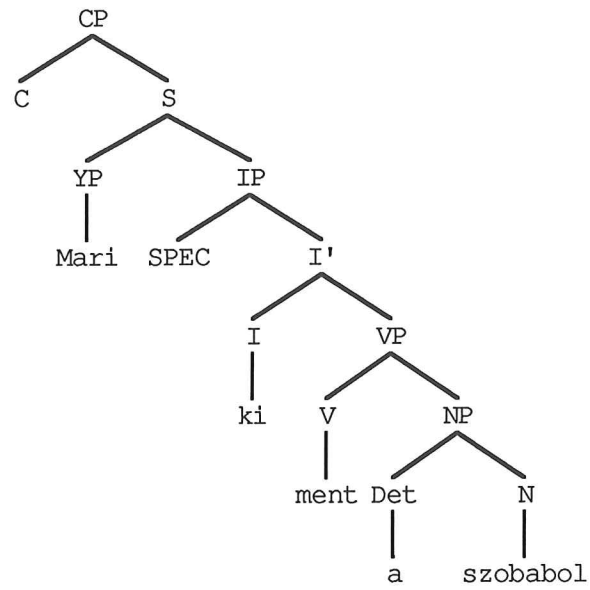


- i. [YP, S] is the TOPIC position (multiple adjunction is possible);  
[SPEC, IP] is the FOCUS position (no adjunction possible).
- ii. CP lacks a SPEC: it could never be filled overtly when C is filled  
and Wh-words appear in [SPEC, IP] (cf. (9a)).
- iii. VP is flat: VP --> V YP\*

I follow É. Kiss 1987 in her claim that Hungarian is non-configurational (though my VP is her S), i.e. that there is no distinguished subject position. But É. Kiss does not posit an IP, which I do. I differ from Farkas 1986 both on the issue of configurationality and on whether there are two focus positions or not. I posit only one focus position, she two, though it is noteworthy that her two positions can never be filled at the same time. My IP is similar to Brody's (1990) F(ocus)P(hrase) in that his focus position is [SPEC, FP], yet the similarity ends there: he assumes configurationality, movement, and other GB ways. I, on the other hand, do not. I differ radically from Horvath 1986 in that she builds the focus position under V' in the VP. Her analysis has ever since been criticized for this feature. This concludes my comparisons with previous analyses.

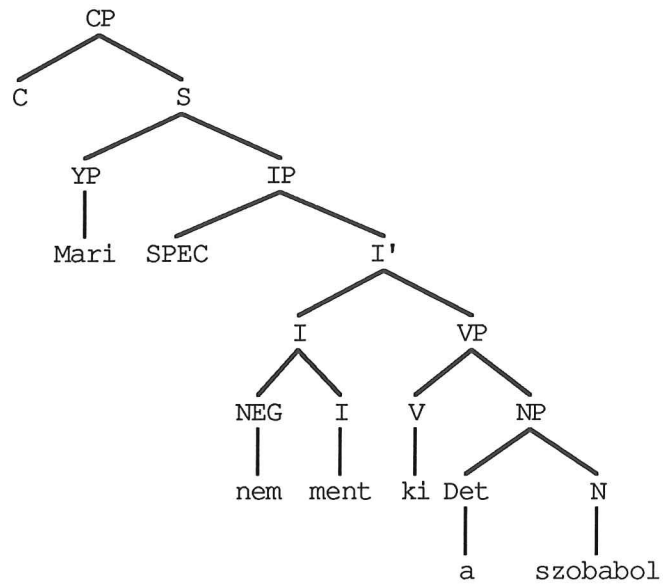


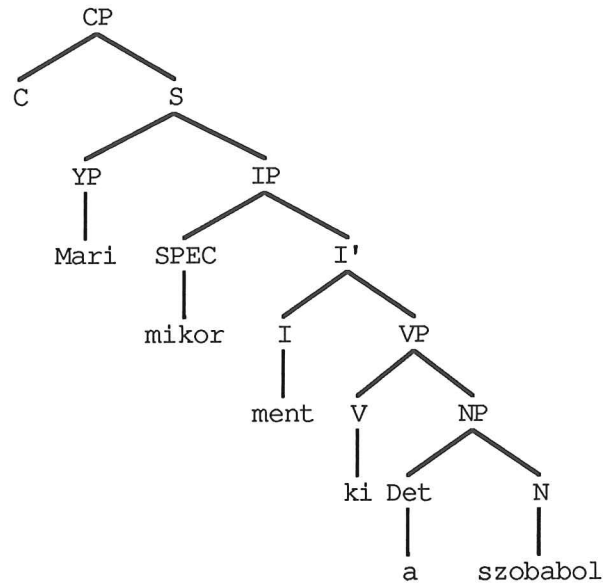
(21) **straight order:**



The next two exemplify reversed order:

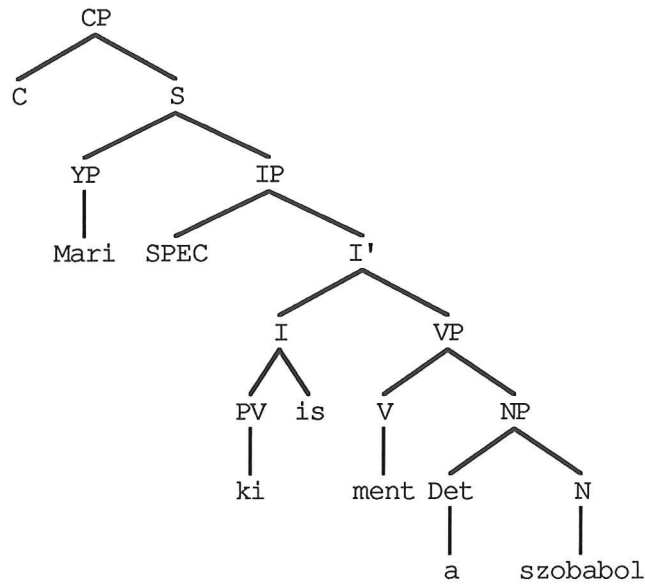
(22) **reversed order:**





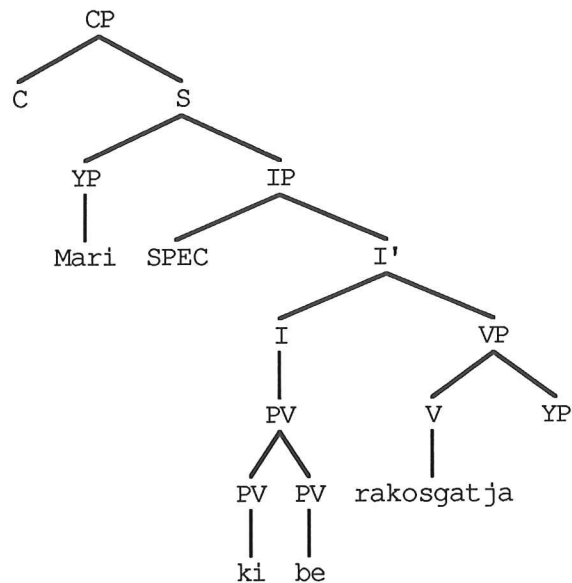
And finally we see broken order:

(23) **broken order:**



In the present analysis the twin and oppositional preverbs behave just as simple preverbs do:

(24) **the oppositional preverb (same for the twin preverb):**



To sum up so far: I have presented an analysis of preverb word orders which accounts for the patterns we find. Since the hypothesis is that both twin and oppositional preverbs are simply compound structures in the lexicon, there is no reason why the syntax should treat them differently from the simple preverbs. It is precisely this ‘blindness’ on the part of the syntax that has been captured in the preceding analysis.

Before I pursue the question of how the reduplicated preverb is to be treated, I want to review my arguments for the hypothesis that whereas both the twin and oppositional preverbs are units in the lexicon, the reduplicated preverb is not. The analysis depends on this hypothesis, but we must ask what the independent arguments in favor of it might be.

Consider first of all the twin preverb. (i) Recall the examples in (4). They clearly show that that e could modify an adverb directly. Given that the directional preverbs were historically adverbials, it is most plausible that e as a degree adverb could modify these preverbs directly as well. (ii) J. Soltész (174) observes that e only combined with preverbs used in their concrete directional sense. This property would be accounted for if e combined directly with the preverb, thereby selecting its concrete directional sense. (iii) The third consideration is that e could combine with nouns marked with a directional adverbial case:

- (25) a. Pafuncius megvigasztaltatec, es ... el hazahoz mene,  
 been.consoled(?) and PV house.his.to going  
 halat advan iŕtenec  
 fish.ACC given God.to

- b. *el romaba mine ... papához*  
 PV Rome.in going Pope.to

Since *el* could combine with such adverbially marked NPs, surely the simplest assumption is that it could combine with directional preverbs as well, i.e. [*el*+PV].

Take next the oppositional preverb. (i) At least historically, the conjunction *(é)s* 'and' appeared between the two preverbs (cf. *fel s alá* 'up and under' in (5a)):

- (26) a. *Ott lesi Miklós a szúnyogháló mellett,/*  
 there spies Nick the mosquito-net beside  
*Györgyből miképp hortyog ki s be a lehellet.*  
 George.out how snores out and in the breath  
 (János Arany: Toldi VI.6)

- b. *Egyre dühödtebben járkált le s fel a szobájában.*  
 more more.enragedly walked down 'n up the room.his.in  
 (Móricz: *Rokonok* 225)

Clearly the phonetically reduced conjunction is indicative of the constituenthood of the oppositional preverb. (ii) Often the verb with only the inner preverb does not even exist (cf. (5)): *\*alá·járkál* 'under-walk', *\*alá·sétál* 'under-stroll', *\*alá·futkos* 'under-run', *\*vissza·hazudik* 'back-lie', *\*vissza·ténfereg* 'back-loaf', *\*vissza·hasogat* 'back-cleave'. In other instances the governed case changes: *le·szaladgál vmire* 'down-hurry onto sg.' vs. *fel·le·szaladgál vhol* 'up-down-hurry somewhere'. This would be inexplicable if the oppositional preverb were not a lexical unit. (iii) The fact that the oppositional preverb consists of two preverbs denoting contradictory directions is easily explained if they select each other, as it were.

More generally, both the twin and oppositional preverbs are easily listable, for the set of each is really quite small, and it is straightforward enough to endow these compounds with a meaning based on the meanings of each of the two preverbs chosen.

Last but not least, consider the reduplicated preverb. (i) Since any preverb can potentially be reduplicated and given that Hungarian has a whole battery of preverbs (60-70), it evident that these should not all be listed but rather generalized by the means of a rule. (ii) Another consideration is that it would be difficult to endow each of these listed preverbs with a separate meaning. Rather, the specific type of iteration at stake depends on which preverb-verb combination the outer preverb is attached to. But if this is so, then this is another reason for not listing all the reduplicated preverbs separately. (iii) A problem arises with verbs like *meg·meg·állapít* 'ascertain', *meg·meg·hökken* 'be taken aback', *meg·meg·győződik* 'get convinced', for here there are no

verbs \*állapít, \*hökken, \*gy\O(o,\S(°))z\O(o,\S(°))dik. Thus, it causes unnecessary complications to suppose that there is a unit [meg-meg] which combines the base verb. (iv) Consider the following examples:

- (27) a. Mari:      Annak    idején    János    nagyon    kiszámíthatatlan    volt.  
                  at.that    time       John     very       unpredictable       was  
 Belém-belém·szeretett—nem    volt    semmi    folytonosság    a  
 in.me-in.me-loved            NEG    was       nothing    continuity    the  
                  kapcsolatunkban.  
                  relationship.our.in  
 Mary: At that time John was very unpredictable. He fell in love with me  
 over and over again—there was no continuity in our relationship.
- b. A    kutyám    rám-rám·ugrott.  
 the   dog.my    on.me-on.me-jumped

If we follow Ackerman 1987 in taking these preverbs to be instances of oblique pronominal incorporation, then how is it that the verb can take two identical arguments? Such arguments cannot be realized as NPs:

- (28)    \*A    kutyám    rá-rá·ugrott                    a    postásra    a    postásra.  
           the   dog.my    on.him-on.him-jumped    the   postman.on    the   postman.on

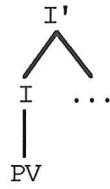
This strongly indicates that there is only one argument position to be satisfied. (v) The reduplicated preverb, in contrast to the oppositional preverb, can neither serve as positive answer to a question nor as a contrastive topic. This again argues that it is not a unit.

More generally, the reduplicated preverb never changes the argument structure of the verb with the single preverb. This would follow if the reduplicated preverb is not available in the lexicon, for then it would not be available to argument structure. It would also explain the data in (27,28), for the reduplicated incorporated pronominal would simply not be present at argument structure. But if the reduplicated preverb is not a unit, then the syntax cannot treat it as one, and reversed order will be impossible. Broken order, despite superficial appearances, does not depend on unithood, as we will see in the final section.

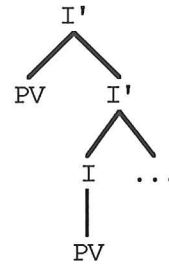
The reduplicated preverb falls in the syntax. In this way it differs crucially and significantly from the other two types, which fall in the lexicon.

## 4. Out

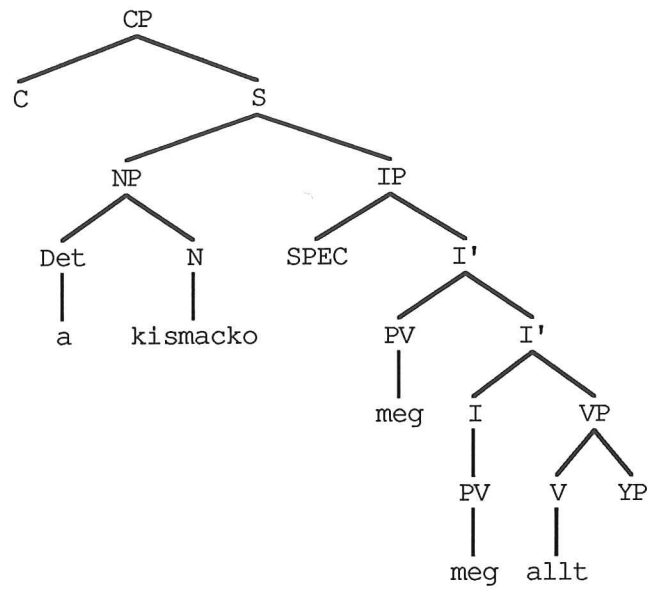
(29) Reduplication: **if**



**then**

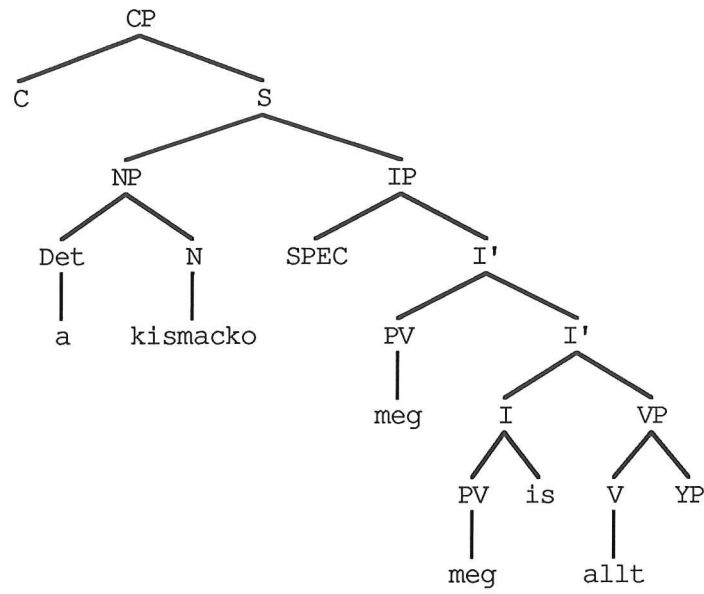


(30) a. Straight reduplication:





b. Reduplication with broken order



c. Another possible reduplication:

