

# Synonymous light verb constructions and synonymy groups. A study of verb variability in Hungarian\*

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## Abstract

Light verb constructions are typically interpreted as idiom-like, fixed patterns in the literature (see e.g. Forgács 2015). However, corpus data suggest that such constructions may also display variability, potentially inviting a study in terms of synonymy. For instance, this is the case with *barátságot köt* [lit. ‘tie a friendship’] ~ *barátságot sző* [lit. ‘weave a friendship’] ~ *barátságot épít* [lit. ‘build a friendship’], all meaning ‘make friends’.

In the present case study, I explore patterns of the structure N-*ba/be* ‘into N’ + V, in particular *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’ (where *feledésbe* means ‘into oblivion’), *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ (where *homályba* means ‘into obscurity’) and *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’ (where *sötétségbe* means ‘into darkness’). More specifically, I examine variants of these LVCs (e.g. *homályba vész* [lit. ‘be lost into obscurity’] ~ *homályba szürkül* [‘fade into oblivion’]), yielding synonym groups. Primarily using corpus data from the Hungarian National Corpus, I seek to find out how these three synonym groups are related semantically, and how their similarities and differences can be described by studying i. central and marginal patterns within them and ii. verbal lexemes (*elfelejtődik* ‘become forgotten’, *elhomályosul* ‘become obscure’ and *elsötétedik* ‘become dark’, respectively) with which they are synonymous.

## 1. Introduction

In previous research (cf. Hrenek 2021a, b), I identified variants of the LVC *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’ (e.g. *feledésbe merül* ‘fall into oblivion, lit. submerge into forgetting’, *feledésbe süllyed* ‘fall [lit. sink] into oblivion’, *feledésbe múlik* ‘fall [lit. pass] into oblivion’) as members of a synonym group, exploring how this synonym group was organized and what factors might affect its organization. Besides, from the processed material it also became apparent that the synonym group in question did not stand alone but was rather

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closely related to the constructions *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ and *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’. This suggested that synonymy might hold not only between patterns that constitute a given synonymy group but rather also between different synonymy groups involving light verbs.

Building on the results of previous research on *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’, the present case study offers an in-depth examination of relationships linking the three LVC synonymy groups mentioned above, also touching on possible motivating factors behind these relationships. After introducing the notion and major types of light verb constructions (Section 2), I present the main research objectives (3) and the material that has been processed (4). This is followed by an analysis of central and peripheral patterns in each synonymy group with the aim of establishing relationships across synonymy groups (5). In Section 6, I move on to discuss relationships between LVCs and synonymous verbal lexemes (e.g. *feledésbe merül* ‘submerge into oblivion [lit. forgetting]’ ~ *elfelejtődik* ‘become forgotten’). In Section 7, I give a brief summary of what similarities and differences have been found across the three synonymy groups. Finally, the paper concludes with a short summary and remarks on possible future lines of investigation (8).

## **2. The notion and types of light verb constructions**

In this study, I interpret light verb constructions as a peculiar, heterogeneous group of verbal constructions that have metaphorical meanings (cf. Lanstyák 2019, Dobos 2009, Hrenek 2019). I consider them as verbal constructions which can be substituted by synonymous<sup>1</sup> verbal lexemes, and whose nominal elements are morphologically clearly linked to these verbal lexemes. This can be illustrated by *virágba borul* ‘bloom, lit. turn into flower’, whose component *virágba* ‘into flower’ is morphologically related to the synonymous verb *(ki-)virág-zik* ‘bloom, lit. (out-)flower-DER.SFX(N→V)’.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in contrast with a common approach in the literature (see e.g. Forgács 2007, Keszler 2000), the present proposal does not define LVCs by reference to the verb’s semantic generality. It is assumed that also with regard to degree of generality, light verb meaning forms an organic part of a given verb’s system of metaphorical senses. Accordingly, the criterion as to how general or grammatical the verb’s meaning is cannot be adopted as a basis of definition but rather only as a possible principle of subcategorization.

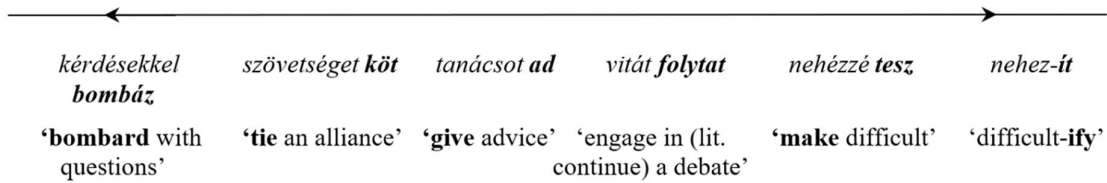
In terms of the function and semantic schematization/grammaticalization of verbs appearing in LVCs, several types of LVC can be distinguished (cf. Hrenek 2016, 2019). These types can be arranged on a scale of ever increasing degrees of generality/grammaticalization (e.g. *szövetséget köt ‘tie an alliance’* → *tanácsot ad ‘give advice’* → *vitát folytat ‘engage in (li. continue) a debate’*). The scale is open on one end toward constructions with verbs of highly specific meaning (e.g. *kérdésekkel bombáz ‘bombard with questions’*) and on the other end toward patterns involving verbs of highly schematic (grammatical) meaning (e.g. *nehézzé tesz ‘make sg difficult’*) as well as morphologically complex verbs featuring grammatical components

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<sup>1</sup> In the present paper, I do not give a detailed, theoretically oriented discussion of the phenomenon of synonymy, including its possible interpretations, gradience, and connections with other types of semantic relation. Synonymy is considered to be a relationship of similarity between the meanings of different linguistic expressions, which is based on (what are perceived as) shared semantic features/components (see e.g. Ladányi 1993); moreover, it is closely related to, but cannot be unproblematically identified with, the notion of interchangeability (see e.g. Murphy 2003).

<sup>2</sup> In the gloss, the abbreviation DER.SFX(N→V) stands for ‘derivational suffix for deriving verbs from nouns’.

(derivational suffixes) (e.g. *nehéz-ít* ‘make difficult, lit. difficult-ify’).<sup>3</sup> The scale is illustrated by Figure 1:



**Figure 1.** Light verb constructions in the system of verbal constructions having metaphorical meanings

### 3. Research questions, theoretical background, methodology

In my case study aimed at a better understanding of synonymy in light verb constructions, I explore and compare three synonymy groups<sup>4</sup> in detail. Through an analysis of corpus-attested instantiations, I study the synonymy groups and variability of the LVCs *feledésbe* + verb (*feledésbe V*, e.g. *feledésbe merül* ‘submerge into oblivion’, *feledésbe borul* ‘fall into oblivion’), *homályba* + verb (*homályba V*, e.g. *homályba vész* ‘get lost into obscurity’, *homályba zuhan* ‘plummet into obscurity’) and *sötétségbe* + verb (*sötétségbe V*, e.g. *sötétségbe borul* ‘fall into darkness’, *sötétségbe süllyed* ‘sink into darkness’). The investigation is based on data from the Hungarian National Corpus (Magyar Nemzeti Szövegtár, henceforth MNSZ2), and its central question is how the synonymy groups just mentioned are interrelated, i.e. what features connect and separate them.

I seek answers to these questions by qualitative methods, primarily by using MNSZ2 and the associated Mazsola query tool developed for the study of verbal constructions. In semantic analyses, I rely on the methods of organic language theory (see e.g. Zsilka 1978, Kelemen–Ladányi–Spannraft 1985, NyMDK. 1–11., for details, see Hrenek 2019).

The research adopts the perspective and analytic methods of organic language theory (see e.g. Zsilka 1975, 1978) and is also informed by the relevant assumptions and results of functional cognitive linguistics (see e.g. Dabrowska–Divjak (eds) 2015, Xu–Taylor (eds) 2020). Moreover, I also build on certain findings of previous studies of light verb constructions couched in other theoretical frameworks (e.g. Cetnarowska 2014, Caro–Arús-Hita 2020, Lanstyák 2019).

## 4. Aspects of the constructions under study and the empirical material

### 4.1. The emergence of the constructions

The three LVCs under study have developed in similar ways and have been affected by similar mechanisms. Therefore, I only give a brief presentation of how these LVCs

<sup>3</sup> The scale presented here is aimed at capturing relationships between verbal constructions from a synchronic perspective. The grammaticalization process of light verbs and a diachronically oriented description of light verb constructions are beyond the scope of the present paper (but see e.g. Itzés 2015; Bowner 2008, Butt–Lahiri 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Synonym groups are dynamically evolving conglomerates which are in constant interaction with their constituting members. Linguistic expressions which are related by synonymy through some of their senses as a result of processes of semantic change (see e.g. Ladányi 1993, 2004, Horváth 1996) do not simply enter a particular synonym group but rather also affect the synonym groups that they have become members of. They may lead to an adjustment or reinterpretation of semantic features or feature clusters that define and give coherence to the synonym groups in question. This issue cannot receive an in-depth discussion within the scope of this paper. The synonym groups under study have been outlined on the basis of corpus data (cf. Section 4.2).

emerged by the example of *feledésbe* V ‘become forgotten’ (for more details, see Hrenek 2021a, b).

This construction presumably originates from *feledésbe* + motion verb combinations (especially *feledésbe megy* ‘go into oblivion’ ~ *feledésbe merül* ‘submerge into oblivion’) and it is in these patterns that its (schematic) constructional meaning developed by abstraction. After the constructional schema had emerged, by analogy of motion verbs in the conventional expressions *feledésbe megy* ‘go into oblivion’ ~ *feledésbe merül* ‘submerge into oblivion’, additional motion verbs and further verbs related to the schematic meaning of the overall construction were also ready to be integrated into the pattern. These novel verbs and the newly emerging constructional variants did not simply elaborate a pre-existing schema but instead had a possible loopback effect on the meaning of the construction, potentially adjusting, specifying or modifying its meaning in subtle ways.<sup>5</sup> Variants of the constructions *homályba* V ‘become obscure’ and *sötétségbe* V ‘become dark’ have developed in similar ways.

#### 4.2. The range of expressions involved in the study

I used MNSZ2 for compiling the list of LVCs belonging to synonym groups. From the full list of query results<sup>6</sup> including all tokens of *feledésbe* ‘into oblivion’, *homályba* ‘into obscurity’ and *sötétségbe* ‘into darkness’, I manually extracted patterns meaning ‘become forgotten’, ‘become obscure’ and ‘become dark’, respectively. After this, I created a list of verbs appearing in these constructions, and specifically searched for each of the target expressions (*feledésbe/homályba/sötétségbe* + V).

Naturally, *feledésbe*, *homályba* and *sötétségbe* appeared as word forms (N + -ba/-be ‘into’) in the queries, whereas lemma search was used for the co-occurring verbal element.

MNSZ2 data suggest that the three synonym groups under study and particular constructions within it are associated with the expressions listed alphabetically in Table 1 below. (In this case, by frequency I mean the number of tokens of a given linguistic unit in the corpus. Because of the low number of tokens, measuring relative frequency was not viable.) The most frequent pattern of each synonym group has been highlighted by bold face and grey background.

**Table 1.** Frequency of occurrence of variants of the constructions under study in MNSZ2

	<i>feledésbe</i> (‘into oblivion’) V	<i>homályba</i> (‘into obscurity’) V	<i>sötétségbe</i> (‘into darkness’) V
<b><i>borul</i> ‘fall, be turned’</b>	2	59	<b>206</b>
<i>burkoló(d)zik</i> ‘be covered’	–	25	21
<i>csomagolódik</i> ‘be wrapped’	–	1	–
<i>enyészik</i> ‘dwindle’	1	–	–
<i>esik</i> ‘fall’	–	–	1
<i>feledkezik</i> ‘be immersed’	–	1	–
<i>hanyatlík</i> ‘decline’	–	1	2
<i>hátrál</i> ‘retreat’	–	1	–
<i>homályosodik</i> ‘become obscure’	1	–	–
<i>hull(ik)</i> ‘fall’	5	15	–
<i>hulldogál</i> ‘fall’	–	–	1
<i>húzódik</i> ‘be drawn’	–	3	–

<sup>5</sup> Langacker (2009) proposes to account for this phenomenon by the notion of *skewing*. Harmonizing this approach with the framework of the present paper would require further research, thus in the analyses presented here I do not rely on the concept.

<sup>6</sup> The word form *feledésbe* occurred 3115 times, *homályba* 1470 times, *sötétségbe* 1002 times in the corpus.

<i>kerül</i> ‘get’	16	7	2
<i>megy</i> ‘go’	227	–	–
<b><i>merül</i> ‘submerge’</b>	<b>2077</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>11</b>
<i>múlik</i> ‘pass’	1	–	–
<i>oszlik</i> ‘dissolve’	1	–	–
<i>süllyed</i> ‘sink’	10	5	1
<i>süpped</i> ‘sink’	1	3	1
<i>szítal</i> ‘sift’	1	–	–
<i>szorul</i> ‘be squeezed’	–	1	–
<i>szürkül</i> ‘turn grey’	–	2	–
<i>törlődik</i> ‘be erased, vanish’	–	1	–
<i>tűnik</i> ‘disappear’	5	7	–
<b><i>vész</i> ‘be lost’</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>6</b>
<i>vonul</i> ‘move’	–	1	–
<i>zuhan</i> ‘plummet’	–	1	2

From the result lists obtained for particular expressions, I removed recurring examples and irrelevant data. Thus, the frequency data in Table 1 do not reflect the data produced by the results of MNSZ2’s automatic analyses, but rather the actual frequency of these verb-based patterns within the corpus.

The data in the Table clearly show that some verbs (e.g. *merül* ‘submerge’, *süllyed* ‘sink’, *vész* ‘be lost’) appear in all three constructions, others occur in two (e.g. *burkoló(d)zik* ‘be covered’, *tűnik* ‘disappear’, *zuhan* ‘plummet’), and yet others are specifically linked to one construction within the corpus under study (e.g. *(el)homályosodik* ‘become obscure’, *húzódik* ‘be drawn’, *esik* ‘fall’). These latter are typically hapax legomena or hapax-like expressions,<sup>7</sup> for which only one or very few tokens are documented even in the constructions in which they do appear (see e.g. *feledésbe enyészik* ‘dwindle into oblivion’). However, since it is semantically motivated which verbs occur in such hapax-like patterns, these expressions may also reveal semantic aspects of synonym groups as well as similarities and differences between them; moreover, they may help further specify the description of constructional meanings. This issue is discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.

Even without an in-depth semantic analysis, it can be observed that the verbs in the table (documented to appear in the constructions under study) form natural semantic groups. Most of them i. have a general meaning in its literal use (e.g. *kerül* ‘get somewhere’) or ii. are motion verbs expressing either downward motion (e.g. *merül* ‘submerge’, *esik* ‘fall’, *süllyed* ‘sink’) or movement away from a reference point (e.g. *megy* ‘go’, *hátrál* ‘retreat’); alternatively, they are iii. verbs whose semantic structure crucially involves the sememe of ‘downward orientation’ (e.g. *borul* ‘fall, be turned over’,  *hanyatlik* ‘decline’), with an additional, smaller group of verbs expressing ‘disappearance’, specifying it in various ways and from various perspectives (e.g. *tűnik* ‘disappear’, *vész* ‘be lost’, *törlődik* ‘be erased; vanish’, *homályosodik* ‘become obscure’).

When the focus is not on the distribution and meaning of verbs but rather on the description of synonym groups, the data also reveal that while several rare or unique examples exist, in each synonym group there is a pattern that can be clearly regarded as conventional and vastly more frequent than synonymous patterns.<sup>8</sup> These

<sup>7</sup> Those constructs are considered as hapax-like expressions here whose verbal components occur in only one of the constructions under study and only a few times (at most three times) in MNSZ2. Within this category, hapaxes are expressions that occur only once in the corpus. It is important to note, however, that what is meant here by number of occurrences is not the frequency with which the structures (as formal patterns) are attested; rather, only those instances are counted which belong to the constructions under study, i.e. which can be interpreted as displaying the relevant constructional meaning.

<sup>8</sup> When characterizing the LVC synonym groups in question, I assume direct proportionality between degree of conventionalization and frequency. At the same time, I am mindful of the fact that frequency is only one of several indicators

highly prominent expressions include *feledésbe merül* ‘fall into oblivion, lit. submerge into forgetting’ with its 2077 tokens, *homályba vész* ‘get lost into obscurity’ (267 tokens) and *sötétségbe borul* ‘fall into darkness’. With 206 occurrences, the latter is less frequent than the previous two, but still undoubtedly has a privileged position within the *sötétségbe V* synonym group.

## 5. The role of central expressions and hapaxes or hapax-like patterns in defining the relationship between synonym groups

In this section, I give an overview of the semantic features of central patterns (5.1) and hapaxes or hapax-like expression (5.2) in each synonym group, with the aim of defining major similarities and differences between the three synonym groups. (These relationships are naturally also bound up with the meaning of nominal elements, but in the present paper, I focus on verbs occurring in the patterns.)

### 5.1. The centre of synonym groups: central patterns

In the case of each of the patterns (*feledésbe merül* ‘submerge into oblivion’, *homályba vész* ‘get lost into obscurity’ and *sötétségbe borul* ‘fall into darkness’), a tight and essential semantic relationship can be observed between the verbal and the nominal element. Besides other factors, this relationship was presumably crucial for the emergence of these patterns (rather than other construction variants) as central within their respective synonym groups. For a detailed discussion of possible motivations behind central status, see e.g. Hrenek (2021a,b).

The verb *merül* ‘submerge’ in *feledésbe merül* (‘fall into oblivion, lit. submerge into forgetting’) refers to a key inherent aspect of the process of forgetting designated by the noun, namely the fact that something becomes inaccessible through submerging to the depth of consciousness. At the same time, the verb construes forgetting as a process that unfolds relatively slowly and gradually, with the result that forgotten memories do not disintegrate or cease to exist; rather, they simply become (temporarily or permanently) inaccessible, unretrievable and incapable of being manipulated. Evoking the process of submerging in water, the meaning of *feledésbe merül* basically draws on the contrast between surface and depth (cf. Szilágyi N. 1996: 32–33; for details, see Hrenek 2021b).

In the pattern *homályba vész* ‘get lost in obscurity’, the verb *vész* ‘get lost’ indicates the blurring or elimination of previously well-defined contours, hindering perception; more precisely, it foregrounds these aspects of obscurity as referred to by the nominal element. Hindered perception may result from a change in optical conditions (in such cases, obscurity is literally interpreted as a circumstance hindering visual perception). However, MNSZ2 data suggest that the word *homályba* ‘into obscurity’ generally has a metaphorical meaning in this pattern. It refers to the limitedness or impossibility of mental processing, of conscious access, often as a function of temporal distance, more specifically the unknowability of certain details of past events or the mysteriousness and unpredictability of future events construed as distant from the speaker. It follows from this that the contrast between proximity and distance is crucial for interpreting the meaning of *homályba vész*.

In *sötétségbe borul* ‘fall into darkness’, what is foregrounded in the noun’s meaning as a result of integration with the verb *borul* ‘fall, turn over’ is that darkness covers entities (concrete physical places, objects and rarely mental contents) as if by a

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of degree of conventionalization, and that the two notions can by no means be regarded as identical (see e.g. Dogruöz–Gries 2012). A theoretical discussion of the relationship between conventionalization and frequency is beyond the scope of the present paper.

blanket, making them invisible in this way. This process of covering is associated with downward movement (just as nightfall is captured by perception as a process from top to bottom, cf. *leszáll az éj* ‘night is falling’). Hence, in the meaning of *sötétségbe borul*, the opposition between up and down seems to be especially significant.

However, the semantic relationships of *feledésbe merül*, *homályba vész* and *sötétségbe borul* do not only concern differences but also basic and fundamental similarities. The unretrievability of memories, the limitedness of perception, and the process of covering all involve the semantic element that something becomes inaccessible to perception or consciousness. In other words, the central pattern of each of the three synonym groups can be interpreted as a specification of the generic feature ‘become inaccessible’, and this feature links not only these concrete patterns to each other but also the synonym groups under study.

## 5.2. The periphery of synonym groups: hapaxes and hapax-like expressions

An analysis of hapaxes and hapax-like expressions confirms the assumption made previously about central patterns, namely that even though the synonym groups under study do overlap, there are also significant differences between them. Hapaxes and hapax-like expressions in the three synonym groups are presented in Table 2 below, based on data from Table 1.

**Table 2.** Hapaxes and hapax-like expressions specifically associated with particular constructions (MNSZ2)

	<i>feledésbe</i> (‘into oblivion’) <i>V</i>	<i>homályba</i> (‘into obscurity’) <i>V</i>	<i>sötétségbe</i> (‘into darkness’) <i>V</i>
<i>enyészik</i> ‘dwindle’	1	–	–
<i>homályosodik</i> ‘become obscure’	1	–	–
<i>múlik</i> ‘pass’	1	–	–
<i>oszlik</i> ‘dissolve’	1	–	–
<i>szítál</i> ‘sift’	1	–	–
<i>csomagolódik</i> ‘be wrapped’	–	1	–
<i>feledkezik</i> ‘be immersed’	–	1	–
<i>szürkül</i> ‘turn grey, fade’	–	2	–
<i>törlődik</i> ‘be erased/deleted, vanish’	–	1	–
<i>hátrál</i> ‘retreat’	–	1	–
<i>húzódik</i> ‘be drawn’	–	3	–
<i>szorul</i> ‘be squeezed’	–	1	–
<i>vonul</i> ‘move’	–	1	–
<i>esik</i> ‘fall’	–	–	1
<i>hulldogál</i> ‘fall’	–	–	1

In the construction *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’, four of the five verbs appearing in hapaxes (*oszlik* ‘dissolve, be divided’, *enyészik* ‘dwindle’, *múlik* ‘pass’ and *homályosodik* ‘become obscure’) capture and evaluate the process from the perspective of loss and/or passing (away). The fifth verb, *szítál* ‘sift’, is one of the verbs expressing downward motion, and construes forgetting in a peculiar manner (cf. Hrenek 2021a, b).

The meaning of the verb *oszlik* ‘dissolve, be divided’ foregrounds the fact that from an entity interpreted as unitary, new, smaller units are formed (at times because of the parts’ movement in space), with the original unit gradually ceasing to exist (e.g. as in *két csoportba, pirosakra és feketékre oszlanak a résztvevők* ‘the participants are

divided into two groups, red and black).<sup>9</sup> Also in the pattern *feledésbe oszlik* ‘dissolve into oblivion’, this verb expresses the dissolving of a memory regarded as an integral whole, and forgetting is construed as disintegration.

The verb *enyészik* ‘dwindle’ portrays forgetting as a change involving the destruction, annihilation (and therefore loss) of memories, placing emphasis on a negative consequence and thus also evaluating the process itself as clearly negative.

The verb *múlik* profiles passing (also passing away), i.e. (an increase in) temporal distance, also involving the notion of loss in interpretation. However, in comparison with *enyészik*, it highlights the speaker’s negative evaluation or negative attitudes to a lesser extent.

*Homályosodik* ‘become obscure’ only partially and indirectly expresses loss and negative evaluation, as it does not include the semantic features just mentioned as inherent aspects of its meaning. *Feledésbe homályosodik* ‘become obscure into oblivion’ is a hapax that can be interpreted as resulting from the blending of, or interplay between, *feledésbe merül* ‘submerge into oblivion’ and *elhomályosodik* ‘become obscure’ as a so-called pregnant expression (see e.g. J. Soltész 1959: 59). At the same time, its emergence may also have been motivated by the patterns *a feledés ködébe vész* ‘get lost in the fog of oblivion’ and *a feledés homályába vész* ‘get lost in the obscurity of oblivion’, which explicitly construe oblivion as an amorphous, obscure place lacking contours. Moreover, they imply that memories being forgotten in this way do not become completely inaccessible, only their retrieval will be greatly hindered. Accordingly, *feledésbe homályosodik* ‘become obscure into oblivion’ also expresses hindered retrieval rather than complete loss of memories, at the same time also highlighting the fading of previously vivid memories that used to have clear contours. The expression thus portrays forgetting as a slow, gradual process that only gets partially accomplished.

In contrast with the verbs just mentioned, *szítál* ‘sift’ foregrounds the sememe of ‘downward orientation’. This verb places emphasis on the slow and gradual nature of forgetting while also conveying the fact that tiny parts, details are removed from memory in a step by step fashion as they move into oblivion.

In the literal meaning and overall semantic structure of verbs specifically and exclusively appearing in hapax and hapax-like instantiations of ***homályba V*** ‘become obscure’ in MNSZ2, a much greater degree of variability can be observed than with verbs occurring as hapaxes in *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’. The eight verbs in question (*hátrál* ‘retreat’, *húzódik* ‘withdraw’, *szorul* ‘be forced’, *vonul* ‘move’, *csomagolódik* ‘be wrapped’, *feledkezik* ‘be lost, lit. forget oneself’, *szürkül* ‘fade’, *törlődik* ‘be deleted’) do not constitute a coherent semantic group.

In the *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ construction, *hátrál*, *húzódik* and *vonul* all construe the entity that moves into obscurity in an antropomorphic way; in the corpus examples, this entity is never a human being. *Hátrál* ‘retreat’ clearly foregrounds the semantic component of ‘distancing’. In the meaning of *húzódik* ‘withdraw’, the process of becoming obscure is construed as volitional movement by the entity in question. *Vonul*, for its part, suggests slow, attention-grabbing and solemn movement. For example:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, passages quoted in the paper have been taken from MNSZ2.

<sup>10</sup> The example in (1) was among the query results of a Google search, and its direct source is <https://blog.poet.hu>. In a hapax-like occurrence of the pattern in MNSZ2, a participial form is found: *A lombok között fészkelődő madarak rikoltoztak, a homályba vonult kék erkélyeken hálógépes asszonyok öntözték a virágokat, a lecsorgó víz ott neszelt a kövezeten* ‘The birds nesting among the leaves were shrieking; on the blue balconies moved into obscurity, women in negligees were watering the flowers, the trickling water was rustling on the pavement’. In this case, balconies are construed as moving (having moved). However, in the linguistically interpreted scene, it is optical conditions that undergo change: changes in the extent of shade are perceived by the observer as movement.



- (1) Szürkét öltött az ég, bíborral beszegve,  
a nap utolsókat sóhajtoz, s lehull:  
színpompás fellépés, aztán máris vége,  
a főszereplő lassan homályba vonul.

‘The sky is dressed in grey with purple lining,  
after his final sighs, the sun drops down,  
the star of the performance has stopped shining,  
it’s time to move off in his gloomy gown.’

(lit. ‘the star moves into dimness/obscurity’)

With *szorul* ‘be forced’, the process is conveyed as a result of pressure. It implies blocking or the presence of an obstacle, thus portraying obscurity as a medium from which it is hard or almost impossible to escape,

*Csomagolódik* ‘be wrapped’ (as well as *burkoló(d)zik*, which is fairly frequent in the *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ construction) conveys the idea that obscurity engulfs the entities at hand, wrapping them up and thereby rendering them inaccessible. As can be seen in example (2), obscurity may appear as a fog-like medium that covers up certain phenomena.

- (2) Nemcsak társadalmi valóságra gondolok, hanem természetire,  
pszichológiaira is. A dolgok általában homályba csomagolódtak, a fizikai,  
természeti, szellemi jelenségek némák. Várákznak.

‘I do not only refer to social reality but also natural and psychological reality.  
Things have generally been wrapped up in obscurity, physical, natural and  
spiritual phenomena are silent. They are waiting.’

*Homályba feledkezik* ‘get immersed in obscurity’ can be understood on the basis of patterns of the type *N-ba/be feledkezik* ‘get immersed in some state or activity’. (Note that *feledkezik* is etymologically a reflexive verb derived from *feled* ‘forget’, thus its primary literal meaning is ‘forget oneself’.) Again, this expression creates a sense that obscurity engulfs, wraps up and covers something, thereby hindering (as the case may be) visual access to it. However, example (3) below also makes it clear that the interpretation of this pattern may be significantly shaped by context. In particular, from the broader context it becomes apparent that the use of *feledkezik* may have been motivated in this case not only by the *(bele)feledkezik vmibe* ‘get immersed into something’ construction but also by the fact that the urban environment in question has been long neglected. The street may be such a poorly lit (and therefore dim, obscure) area because those maintaining it have been negligent, they have forgotten about it.

- (3) hármásban vonultak egy elhanyagolt világítású utcán, a múlt század közepi  
városrész szíve felé. És bármilyen homályba feledkezett volt is a környék,  
egy-két járókelőnek mégis feltűnt, s ki tudja, milyen eszmetársításokat  
ajándékozott a furcsa összetételű társaság.

‘they were moving/marching in three in a street with poor lighting, towards  
the heart of the district built in the middle of the previous century. And even

though the environment had been immersed in dimness, some passers-by still noticed the strange company and who knows what impressions they were left with.'

The expression *homályba szürkül* 'fade into obscurity' construes (metaphorically understood) obscurity in relation to greyness, associated with colourlessness, dullness – bringing the concepts of obscurity and greyness in interplay, which are related not only in a concrete physical sense but also at a metaphorical level. The two semantic components of the light verb construction therefore interpret and reinforce each other, as also demonstrated by the utterance excerpt in (4) below.

- (4) A Harmadnapon, a Nagyvárosi ikonok staccatói, a Rekviem crescendója, a Kráter adagioja már az első mondat után homályba szürkül ...

'The staccatos of Harmadnapon and Nagyvárosi ikonok, the crescendo of Rekviem and the adagio of Kráter [poems by János Pilinszky] all fade into obscurity after the first sentence' ...

With the verb *törlődik* 'get erased/deleted', the concept of obscurity is interpreted as a phenomenon that makes the boundaries, uniqueness and independent existence of an entity less certain. It highlights a specific aspect of the meaning of *homály(ba)* '(into) obscurity'. For example, in the passage in (5), it directs attention to the fact that obscurity eliminates the previously sharp or at least well-perceivable (for consciousness and memory, easy-to-access) contours, boundaries and integrity of an entity, namely a segment of the road that can be interpreted both literally (in reference to physical places, streets) or metaphorically (in reference to a part of one's life path). Hence, even the existence of memory about the road segment covered by obscurity may be questioned.

- (5) Lementem az utcára; mentem esetlenkedni tovább, éretté válásomnak ezeken a homályba törlődött útszakaszain. No, vannak világos emlékképvillogások is.

'I went down to the street; I went on to act awkwardly, on these road segments of my maturation that had been erased into obscurity. Well, there are also clear flashes of memories.'

The passage *világos emlékképvillogások* 'clear flashes of memories' in the second sentence is in sharp contrast with the expression *homályba törlődött útszakasz* 'road segments erased into obscurity' – supporting the assumption that *road segment* is indeed to be primarily interpreted here in a metaphorical way.

**The construction *sötétségbe V*** ('get dark, lit. get covered in darkness') is associated with only two hapaxes in MNSZ2, namely *sötétségbe esik* 'fall into darkness' and *sötétségbe hulldogál* 'keep falling into darkness'. Both expressions refer to negatively evaluated processes of change, and can be interpreted in relation to mental phenomena (*teljes szellemi sötétségbe estem* 'I fell into complete mental darkness'; *dús értelme [...] sötétségbe hulldogál* 'its rich meaning [...] keeps falling into darkness'). In the meaning of the verbs involved, 'downward orientation' becomes prominent (see also the metaphor DOWN IS BAD; Szilágyi N. 1996, Kövecses 2002).

The verb *esik* 'fall' construes (mental or spiritual) darkness as depth, without referring to aspects of the manner in which the process unfolds. *Hulldogál* 'keep falling' can also be interpreted in the same context, i.e. by taking the duality of up and down into account, as well as associated evaluative meanings (cf. Szilágyi N. 1996). However,

its meaning is more complex and specific than the relevant meaning of *esik*. Capturing change as continuous falling implies that according to the speaker, the process unfolds slowly, gradually, almost without being noticed.

## **6. Semantic relationships between the patterns under study and synonymous verbs**

Examining the range of verbs occurring in central patterns of the synonym groups as well as hapaxes or hapax-like instantiations of the constructions, we have seen that semantic features of construction variants involve general aspects of meaning (such as 'becoming inaccessible') that define and keep together particular synonym groups. At the same time, they also allow specific semantic components to be detected that separate these construction variants and the three synonym groups.

However, the semantic features analysed or inferred in this way are by themselves not sufficient for offering a fine-grained characterization of synonym groups and their relations to each other. As we are dealing with light verb constructions, it is by all means necessary to explore the semantics of verbs which are synonymous with these constructions and morphologically related to their nominal components, including semantic relationships across these verbs. This is because synonym groups involving light verbs are fundamentally and primarily linked by a shared basic meaning which can be most accurately described through the study of synonymous verbs.<sup>11</sup> In other words, the issue of how synonym groups are related can also be tackled from the perspective of synonymous verbs and their semantic relations to each other.

Although from a different perspective, verbs which are synonymous with light verb constructions appear to yield similar conclusions about the relationship between synonym groups as central patterns and verbs appearing in hapaxes or hapax-like expressions (see Section 5). However, a study of synonymous verbs also reveals which processes and relationships in the world these verbs and (in most of their senses) synonymous LVCs typically refer to, as well as which meanings create links between particular synonym groups (either potentially or as attested by empirical data), which aspects of meaning are specific to each of the synonym groups. Verbs which are synonymous with LVCs are related to the nominal components of the latter not only morphologically but also semantically (cf. *feledésbe* 'into oblivion, lit. into forgottenness' – *elfelejtődik* 'become forgotten', *homályba* 'into obscurity' – *elhomályosul/elhomályosodik* 'become obscure', *sötétségbe* 'into darkness' – *elsötétül/elsötétedik* 'become dark'). Hence, most of the findings to be made below about the meaning of these verbs can be to some extent applied to the corresponding nouns as well, and can be organically integrated into the analysis that has been presented.

**The verb *elfelejtődik* 'become forgotten' and the LVC *feledésbe V* are in principle synonymous in all of their meanings. However, it is a key factor (at times restricting interchangeability) that particular construction variants often provide**

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<sup>11</sup> The fact that the meaning of constructions is specified here by reference to the meaning of synonymous verbs follows from methodological necessity and is clearly a simplifying method of description. As also noted above, the meaning of a light verb construction is a complex and to some extent context-dependent system of semantic components which of course cannot be adequately described simply by referring to a single other verb (e.g. the verbal content 'become forgotten' of *elfelejtődik* cannot accurately capture the meaning of *feledésbe V*). However, linguistic meanings are not accessible by themselves, without employing linguistic forms, hence their description is only possible with the help of other linguistic elements, which themselves have peculiar and complex meanings. In the case at hand, the light verb constructions under study and corresponding synonymous verbs are semantically close to each other, and their spheres of use also have much in common (cf. Hrenek 2021b, c). For these reasons, I do not consider it an oversimplification that constructional meanings are specified via synonymous verbs.

access to the portrayed situation from a peculiar perspective, also expressing the speaker's evaluation, whereas the use of *elfelejtődik* can rather be (in some cases) specific from a pragmatic perspective.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, it is true for both types of construal that they profile mental processes without exception, i.e. they linguistically represent phenomena about which one can only talk with the help of metaphorical expressions. In accordance with this, associated nominals in the subject position invariably designate mental contents (memories, thoughts, attitudes, abilities, customs, beliefs, etc.). This remains true even when they refer to objects or persons, as in these cases what is being referred to is not the physical entities or persons themselves but rather mental representations, memories, knowledge, feelings, etc. about them.

In the case of ***elhomályosul/elhomályosodik***<sup>13</sup> 'become obscure' and the ***homályba V*** construction, interchangeability is not only (and not primarily) constrained by the fact that instantiations of the LVC often construe the portrayed event more specifically, expressing some special speaker attitude or perspective, than *elhomályosul* and *elhomályosodik*. The main semantic difference between synthetic and analytic forms of expression is instead manifested in the fact that the verbs are not synonymous with LVC patterns in all of their meanings. Such cases are illustrated by the passages in (6) and (7) (both utterances are taken from the lexical entry of *elhomályosodik* in Nsz., an archived file-card system contributing to the corpus behind the Comprehensive Dictionary of Hungarian):

(6) az opálnak az a neme, amit „hydrophan”-nak neveznek. Ha vízzel teleszívja magát, akkor a szivárvány minden színeiben ragyog, de ha lassan kiszárad, elhomályosodik [*\*homályba V*]

'a type of opal called hydrophan. When it is soaked in water, it glows with all the colours of the rainbow, but when it gradually dries, it becomes pale/obscure'

(7) [a polcról] az imént vette le a házigazda a végképpen elhomályosodott [*\*homályba V*], igen vastag üvegű borospoharakat

'[from the shelf] the host has just taken off the by now completely opaque [*\*homályba V*], thick-walled wine glasses'

Synonymity is presumably limited here by the fact that *homályba V* construes the starting point or origin of obscurity as a phenomenon that is independent of the subject referent. For instance, in the expression *homályba merül egy emlék* 'a memory submerges/sinks into obscurity', the memory referred to by the subject is not changed by obscurity from within but rather it engulfs it from outside, as an environmental effect. This vantage point is not compatible with the fact that in (6) and (7), obscurity

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<sup>12</sup> *Elfelejtődik* 'become forgotten' may imply that something is not deliberately ignored, rather the process of forgetting occurs unintentionally, accidentally. However, something can also be construed as having become forgotten when somebody (for whatever reason, either intentionally or unintentionally) has ignored a factor, piece of information, argument, etc. which is considered crucial by the speaker. In such cases, the use of *elfelejtődik* may suggest (often in a manipulative or ironic way) that the factor in question can only have been accidentally ignored by the other person, with the speaker presupposing the unquestionable authenticity, accessibility, relevance and importance of this factor. According to MNSZ2 data, such implications are much less likely to arise in the case of synonymous light verb constructions.

<sup>13</sup> In Hungarian, *elhomályosul* and *elhomályosodik* 'become obscure' as well as *elsötétül* and *elsötétedik* 'become dark' can be regarded as formal variants, and accordingly their meanings can be considered to be largely identical. Differences between their spheres of use are not significant according to dictionary and corpus data, and they are not addressed in the present paper.

„starts off” from within the entity becoming opaque rather than being interpreted as an independent external effect or phenomenon.

It can also be interpreted as a limiting factor of synonymy, albeit less clear and significant, that even though *elhomályosul* and *elhomályosodik* are potentially synonymous with *homályba V* in virtually all meanings, corpus occurrences of the LVC suggest that variants of the *homályba V* construction typically refer to more abstract phenomena; not infrequently, their meaning can be interpreted in relation to temporal distance, more specifically in relation to limited knowledge and retrievability caused by temporal distance. This relationship is explicitly marked, for example, by the expressions *a feledés / a múlt / a történelem homályába vész* ‘be lost in the obscurity of oblivion / the past / history’, which incidentally create a strong link between the *feledésbe V* and *homályba V* constructions and their variants. By contrast, synonymous verbs are more likely to refer to concrete or less abstract processes. However, this difference in use does not amount to a clear distinction, and can only be mentioned as a trend supported by available data. Even though less frequently than corresponding verbs, LVC patterns may also express concrete obscurity, dimness as caused by a change in optical conditions.

**Both *elsötétül/elsötétedik* and the *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’ construction** may refer to changes in optical conditions and unwelcome, negatively evaluated changes of state whose result can be metaphorically conceptualized as darkness; they can designate both the deterioration of optical conditions or restrictions on visual perception and more generally any kind of limitation on perception or mental access. In this case, however, corpus data suggest that LVCs more often refer to changes in optical conditions than synonymous verbs, which are more likely to denote abstract processes (co-occurring with nominals having abstract meanings). Apart from this, corpus data reveal that in almost all of their meanings, *elsötétül* and *elsötétedik* are synonymous with the LVC *sötétségbe V*, and conversely. Only one meaning constitutes an exception. When the verbs refer to the darkening of an entity whose change of colour is not caused by external factors, the verbs and the LVC patterns are not interchangeable. To quote examples from Nsz. again:

(8) Léteznek olyan szemüvegek, amelyek a mindenkori fényerőtől függően sötétednek el [*\*borulnak/vesznek* stb. *sötétségbe*]

‘There exist glasses which become dark as a function of the environment’s brightness’ [*\*borulnak/vesznek*, etc. *sötétségbe*]

(9) Néemelykor a lilaszín egész elsötétedik [*\*sötétségbe V*], csaknem az egész virág fekete lesz

‘Sometimes the purple colour becomes completely dark [*\*sötétségbe V*], almost the entire world gets dark’

In this case too, the impossibility of substitution presumably stems from the fact that light verb constructions (variants of *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’) construe darkness as an external entity independent from the phenomenon designated by the subject. Put differently, the point of departure of darkness is not identical with the entity becoming dark during the process designated by the construction. For example, in the expression

*sötétségbe borul az erdő* ‘the forest gets covered in darkness’, darkness is not conceptualized as originating from the forest itself, extending from within, as it were.

When the three LVCs in question are compared not only with synonymous verbs but also with each other, further insight can be gained about relations between synonym groups.

It can be ascertained, for example, that although through different senses, *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ is linked to both the *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’ and the *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’ constructions.

With the former, the connection is based on the fact that the process of forgetting often imagistic(ally represented) memories, related to temporal distance for everyday perception, may be conceptualized as the fading of images that used to be detailed, sharp and easily retrievable, so that conscious access to them are rendered more difficult (see e.g. *megfakuló, elhomályosuló, elmosódó emlékek* ‘fading, dimming, blurring memories’; *a feledés homálya borít vmit* ‘sg is covered in the obscurity of oblivion/forgetting’; *vmi a feledés homályába vész* ‘sg is lost in the obscurity of oblivion/forgetting’). Thus, forgetting can be conceived of as obscurity that hinders remembering and retrieval by covering memories.

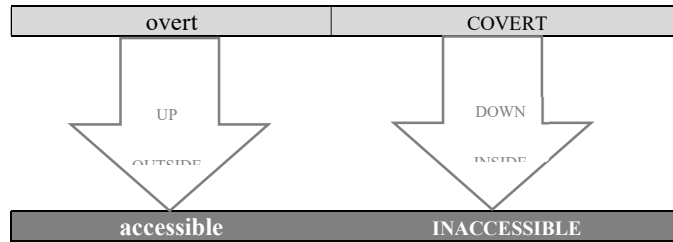
At the same time, *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ is also closely related to the synonym group of *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’. The basis of this connection is presumably the fact that in a concrete, physical sense, both obscurity and darkness are phenomena resulting from a change in optical conditions, more specifically a decrease in brightness, which therefore hinder or block visual perception, and their difference is gradual in nature. However, the relationship between obscurity and darkness is even more intimate than this, also manifesting itself at the level of metaphorical meanings; in the case at hand, those of verbs and synonymous light verb constructions. At a metaphorical level, both obscurity and darkness may be interpreted as factors or circumstances that hinder access and understanding.

Thus, when it comes to links between synonym groups, it can be established that *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ serves as a bridge between *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’ and *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’, which are themselves not directly related (or at best very weakly related) to each other.

## 7. Overview: relationships between the three synonym groups

For describing the semantic characteristics of the constructions under study, especially because the patterns convey processes of change, it is worth exploring the oppositions by which relationships (similarities and differences) between the three synonym groups can be interpreted. These are summarized in Figure 2 below, with the right-hand column featuring semantic components that directly define the synonym groups under study.

<i>feledésbe V</i>	
memory	FORGETTING
conscious	UNCONSCIOUS
value	LOSS
<i>homályba V</i>	
close	DISTANT
having clear contours	NOT HAVING CLEAR CONTOURS
certain	UNCERTAIN
<i>sötétségbe V</i>	
visible	NOT VISIBLE
known	UNKNOWN



**Figure 2.** Relationships between the three synonym groups

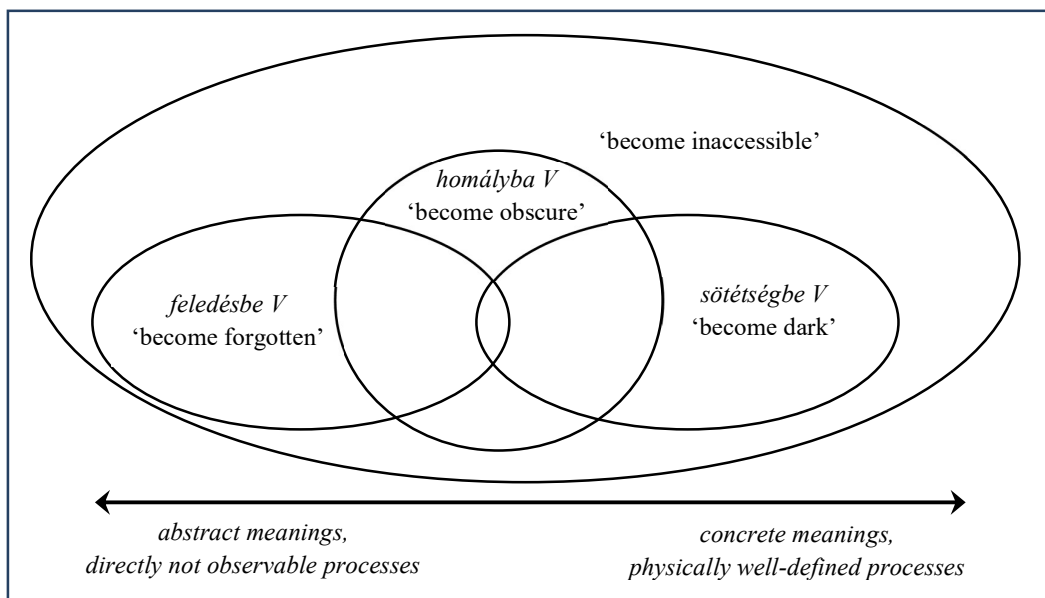
Each of the three constructions under study conveys the cessation, disintegration or blocking of something, expressing some kind of absence, which can only be captured in relation to corresponding elements in the left-hand column. It is important to add, however, that neither of the two columns can be interpreted by itself, without taking the other side into account.

Although Figure 2 primarily focuses on the specific features of synonym groups and on differences between these synonym groups, the analyses above also highlighted the fact that these synonym groups are not clearly and neatly separated from each other. Rather, they have an effect on each other, they may affect each other's interpretation, and in some cases even patterns belonging to different synonym groups may become synonymous in their use. These similarities and connections can be primarily motivated by the fact that albeit with different specifications, focal points and against different backgrounds for interpretation, each synonym group conveys the idea of something becoming inaccessible, unperceivable and/or unreachable through entering a state that is spatially conceptualized as lying inside or down,<sup>14</sup> with a key role played by the concept of 'becoming inaccessible'. Crucially, this general concept does not only supply coherence among patterns belonging to particular synonym groups, but also links the three synonym groups to each other.

In consideration of these, and also the relationships detected previously about the three LVC synonym groups, the relationships between *feledésbe V* 'become forgotten' (necessarily applied to abstract phenomena), *homályba V* 'become obscure' (available for describing boht

<sup>14</sup> This kind of linking of spatial dimensions is not unusual in language. Spatial dimensions (e.g. DOWN – INSIDE – FAR – BEHIND) are intimately related, and this relationship is often manifested in linguistic expressions (cf. Szilágyi N. 1996: 31–32).

abstract and concrete processes) and *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’ (typically for expressing concrete changes in optical conditions) can be schematically represented as follows.



**Figure 3.** Relationships between the three synonym groups

As a further factor reinforcing the relationship between synonym groups, it is worth mentioning that the variants of all three constructions typically refer to negative(ly interpreted) processes of change (loss, distancing, etc.), whose construal is presumably informed by the DOWN IS BAD, DARK(NESS) IS BAD and DISTANT IS BAD conceptual metaphors (see e.g. Szilágyi N. 1996, Kövecses 2002).

## 8. Summary and concluding remarks

In the present research I studied three LVC synonym groups, *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’, *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ and *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’ along with their relations to each other.

With regard to their organization, the three synonym groups are highly similar to each other (cf. Table 1). The degrees to which particular patterns are conventionalized, and their positions within synonym groups, are mostly determined by the semantic relationships that hold between their nominal and verbal elements. Verbs appearing in central patterns (namely *feledésbe merül* ‘submerge/sink into oblivion’, *homályba vész* ‘get lost in obscurity’ and *sötétségbe borul* ‘get covered in darkness’) foreground central aspects of the meaning of nominals. They form tightly integrated units with associated nominal elements, which may contribute to the conventionalization of these patterns. By contrast, non-central and unconventional patterns construe a given process from a specific perspective, also implying a specific attitude on behalf of the speaker.

In addition, the study has shown that the synonym groups in question are primarily defined by the general concept of ‘becoming inaccessible’, which also links these groups to each other. However, this concept is interpreted against different backgrounds, in association with different semantic components in the three constructions (see Figure 2), and these distinct interpretations make it possible to spot differences between the synonym groups.



A further difference between the constructions is that while *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’ necessarily refers to mental (i.e. directly not perceivable) processes, *homályba V* ‘become obscure’ and *sötétségbe V* ‘become dark’ may pertain to either concrete or abstract phenomena. (Having said this, in the corpus, the latter predominantly designates concrete processes involving changes in optical conditions.) *Homályba V* ‘become obscure’ seems to serve as a bridge between the two other constructions, which are themselves not directly related (or only weakly so). This is because, on the one hand, forgetting may be conceptualized as the fading of memories, and on the other, darkness and obscurity can be interpreted as two overlapping segments of a scale in both concrete and metaphorical senses.

The claims made above about the organization of synonym groups lend further support to the conclusions reached in my previous studies of the *feledésbe V* ‘become forgotten’ synonym group (cf. Hrenek 2021a, b). The novum of the present research is that it has placed the latter construction into a broader context, with synonymy explored not only within a particular LVC synonym group but also across related synonym groups.

In the course of research, several outstanding questions and problems have emerged which are related to the present paper’s goals but also partially go beyond them. In what follows, I only mention some of the major future lines of investigation.

Firstly, the present research has explored the properties of LVC synonym groups and possible relations between them solely on the basis of three synonym groups. It would be worth performing the analyses on more extensive material, with the involvement of significantly more LVC constructions. The results gained in this way would presumably yield a more fine-grained picture of the constructions under study.

The three synonym groups have been shown to display a relatively high degree of variability. Therefore, it can be posed as a further question whether other light verb constructions (semantically unrelated to those explored in this paper) also exhibit variability, and if so, to what extent. Corpus data suggest that variability is not always present (e.g. the expression *esküt tesz* ‘take an oath’ appears to be fixed), and very different degrees of variability may be found within particular synonym groups (e.g. according to MNSZ2, *barátságot V* ‘make friends’ and *szövetséget V* ‘forge an alliance’ are subject to variation to a much lesser degree than the construction *pillantást V* [*vmire*] ‘take a glimpse [at]’). Accordingly, it would be worth examining what factors may affect degree of variability and the extension of particular synonym groups. For example, it could be examined whether variability correlates with the position of other LVC synonym groups’ central, conventional patterns on the scale presented in Section 2.

Finally, it seems worth investigating a) what factors may influence the range of contexts in which patterns within a given synonym group are interchangeable (or not interchangeable), b) what are the semantic bases of interchangeability, c) what semantic

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features, correlations hinder interchangeability (thus also potentially limiting synonymy).

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