The structure of the Hungarian sentence

(Kálmán, 2001)

### Discourse relations and the Hungarian syntactic structure

**Anna Gazdík**¹,² & **Grégoire Winterstein**¹

- **K. Kiss (1995):** the syntactic structure of discourse-configurational languages is determined by the discourse functions of its elements, i.e. by the relations between the sentence and the discourse, and not by grammatical functions that occupy a specific position in the sentence.
- **Hungarian:** the preverbal part of the sentence is determined by the information structure. The linear order of the preverbal domain adjusts according to the actual discourse configuration.

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<tr>
<th>Discourse-configurational languages</th>
<th>The structure of the Hungarian sentence</th>
<th>The Prominent Preverbal Position (PPP)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Focus (semantically distinguished element, usually formally marked: pitch accent, syntactic position, morphology, etc.)</td>
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<td>• Often associated with Focus (K. Kiss 2002)</td>
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<td>• A variety of non-focalized elements can appear in the PPP (see the distribution)</td>
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<td>• The focus of the sentence can appear outside the PPP (multiple foci, etc.)</td>
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<td>• Common semantic interpretation? [⇒ \text{specificational predicates} ] (K. Kiss, 2006)</td>
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<td>• What is the discourse function of the PPP?</td>
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<td>• Suggestion: preferred position for constituents that enter into the construction of text structuring discourse relations (Asher &amp; Lascarides, 2003)</td>
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</table>

### Distribution in the PPP

#### The PPP in non-reactive “neutral” sentences

**Verbal modifiers** (particles (1-a), bare nominal complements (1-b))

1. a. János Kolvasta a könyvet. (verbal particle) János VM.read.PST the book.ACC
   John finished the book.

2. b. János FÁT vág az őerdőben. (bare nominal complement) János wood.ACC chop the forest.LINE
   John is chopping wood in the forest.

- **Infinitives and negative words**

3. a. János KIRANDULNI akar. János hiking want
   John wants to go hiking.

4. b. János NEM akar kirándulni. (negative word) János not want hiking
   John doesn’t want to go hiking.

- **Secondary predicates**

5. a. János PÍRÓSRA festette a kerítést. János red.SUBJ paint.PST the fence.ACC
   John has painted the fence red.

6. The HOCUS (Kálman, 1985)
   – Denotes an unusual feature (participant/circumstance) of an event
   – Used in a sentence that targets this unusual feature
   – \# focus (no pitch accent)

7. a. Yesterday John took the train to go home.

**The PPP in reactive “neutral” sentences**

- **Focus** (semantically distinguished element, usually formally marked: pitch accent, syntactic position, morphology, etc.)

| a. Who invited Mary to the party? b. No, she finished Crime and Punishment. |

| a. Who invited Mary to the party? |
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## Hypothesis

**Text structuring discourse relations imply that a particular isomorphism exists between the structures of their arguments (Asher & Lascarides 2003)**

- **More often than not,** this entails that a particular element of their right argument is distinguished, e.g. by contrasting with a corresponding element.

| a. Who invited Mary to the party? b. No, she finished Crime and Punishment. |
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## Discourse structure

- **Switching the markers and elements in the PPPs results in in felicity/degradation**

**A concrete example**

9. **A lányok**PPP nyertek meg tgnap a kajakversenyt, a fiúkPPP the girls won the kayak contest.ACC, the boys pedig a kenuverseny.
   Whereas the canoe contest.ACC
   It was the girls who won the kayak contest yesterday, and the boys who won the canoe contest.

10. **A lányok**PPP nyertek meg tgnap a kajakversenyt, és aztán a girls PPP-WON yesterday the kayak contest.ACC, and then the fiúk a kenuverseny.
    boys the canoe contest.ACC
    Yesterday, the girls won the kayak contest, and then the boys won the canoe contest.

- **Switching the markers and elements in the PPPs results in in felicity/degradation**

11. a. **A lányok**PPP nyertek meg tgnap a kajakversenyt, és aztán a girls PPP-WON yesterday the kayak contest.ACC, and then the fiúk a kenuverseny.
    boys the canoe contest.ACC
    b. **A lányok**PPP nyertek meg tgnap a kajakversenyt, a fiúk the girls PPP-WON yesterday the kayak contest.ACC, the boys pedig a kenuverseny.
    whereas the canoe contest.ACC

### References


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**Conclusions & Openings**

- Due to the variety of elements that appear therein, a single semantic definition of PPP is hard to achieve.
- A more discursive approach appears more promising.
- Hungarian grammaticalizes a notion of distinguished element that discourse relations can interpret.
- The properties of such elements cannot be reduced to usual definitions of focus.
- Some authors advocate a direct relationship between focus and prosody.
- The Hungarian data suggest a new and different definition of focus, based on the correspondence between elements in the interpretation of discourse.