

DISCOURSE RELATIONS AND THE HUNGARIAN SYNTACTIC STRUCTURE

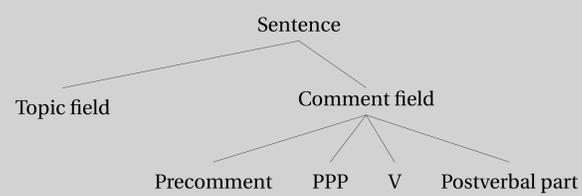
Anna Gazdik^{1,2} & Grégoire Winterstein¹

Discourse-configurational languages

- É. 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.

The structure of the Hungarian sentence

(Kálmán, 2001)



Topic field: elements relating the sentence to the current discourse topic.

Precomment: distributive quantifiers that follow a given order.

The Prominent Preverbal Position (PPP)

- Often associated with *Focus* (É. Kiss 2002)
- A variety of non-focalized elements can appear in the PPP (see the distribution)
- The focus of the sentence can appear outside the PPP (multiple foci, etc.)
- Common semantic interpretation? ⇒ *specificational predicates* (É. Kiss, 2006)
- ⇒ What is the discourse function of the PPP?
 - **Suggestion**: preferred position for constituents that enter into the construction of text structuring discourse relations (Asher & Lascarides, 2003)

Distribution in the PPP

The PPP in non-reactive “neutral” sentences

- Verbal modifiers (particles (1-a), bare nominal complements (1-b))
 - (1) a. János **KI**olvasta a könyvet. (verbal particle)
János VM.read.PST the book.ACC
John finished the book.
b. 'János 'FÁT vág az 'erdőben. (bare nominal complement)
János wood.ACC chop the forest.INESS
John is chopping wood in the forest.
- Infinitives and negative words
 - (2) 'János 'KIRÁNDULNI akar.
János hiking want
John wants to go hiking.
 - (3) 'János 'NEM akar 'kirándulni. (negative word)
János not want hiking
John doesn't want to go hiking.
- Secondary predicates
 - (4) János **PIROSRA** festette a kerítést.
János red.SUBL paint.PST the fence.ACC
John has painted the fence red.
- The *HOCUS* (Kalman, 1985)
 - Denotes an unusual feature (participant/circumstance) of an event
 - Used in a sentence that targets this unusual feature
 - ≠ focus (no pitch accent)
 - (5) János tegnap **VONATTAL** utazott haza. (NP)
János yesterday by train travel.PST home
Yesterday John took the train to go home.

The PPP in reactive “non-neutral” sentences

- Focus (semantically distinguished element, usually formally marked: pitch accent, syntactic position, morphology, etc.)
 - (6) a. Q: Who invited Mary to the party?
b. A: **ZOLI** hívta meg (Mari a bulira). (information focus)
ZOLI invite.PST VM (Mari.ACC the party.SUBL)
It was ZOLI who invited her (to the party).
 - (7) a. Mary finished yesterday *War and Peace*.
b. Nem, **A BÚN ÉS BÚNHÓDÉST** olvasta ki. (contrastive focus)
no, the Crime and Punishment.ACC read.PST VM
No, she finished Crime and Punishment.
- Question words
 - (8) **Kit** hívott meg János? (question word)
who.ACC invite.PST VM János
Who did John invite?

Discourse structure

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.
- In Hungarian, this element will be localized in the PPP; i.e. it constrains the isomorphism.
- Thus, relations such as CONTRAST, PARALLEL, and QUESTION-ANSWER PAIR, will be heavily constrained by the elements in the PPP: it will be the pivotal element of their semantics.
- In the case the verb is that element, the PPP will be empty, because the verb cannot occupy a preverbal position.
- For questions, the PPP is occupied by the *wh*-word, which is crucially not a focus, and which is central to the semantics of the question.
- Discourse relations that have no such requirement allow the variety observed in (1)–(5): since the sentence is usually all-focus, a single sub-constituent cannot act as narrow-focus. A good example of such a discourse relation is the case of NARRATION.

A concrete example

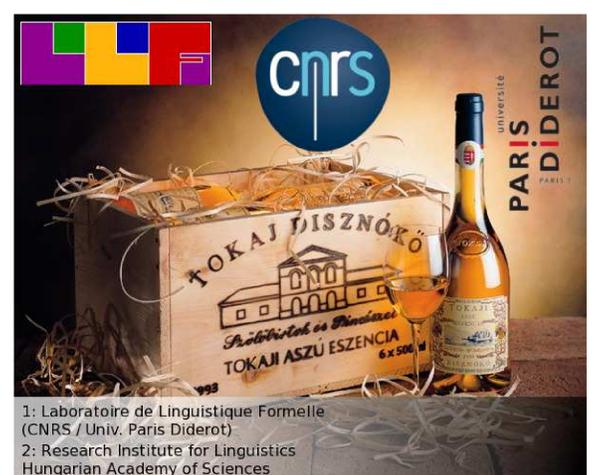
- (9) [A **lányok**]_{PPP} nyerték meg tegnap a **kajakversenyt**, [a **fiúk**]_{PPP} pedig a **kenuversenyt**.
the girls won PRT yesterday the kayak contest.ACC, the boys
whereas the canoe contest.ACC
It was the girls who won the kayak contest yesterday, and the boys who won the canoe contest.
 - (9) is preferably interpreted as an answer to: *Who won the kayak contest and who won the canoe contest?*, i.e. with a CONTRAST relation, marked by *pedig*.
 - If the PPP is occupied by the particle *meg*, this interpretation disappears, NARRATION is preferred instead, as marked by *és aztán* ('and then').
- (10) A **lányok** [meg]_{PPP}-nyerték tegnap a kajakversenyt, és aztán a **fiúk** a **kenuversenyt**.
the girls PRT-WON yesterday the kayak contest.ACC, and then the
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 infelicity/degradation
- (11) a. #A **lányok** nyerték meg tegnap a **kajakversenyt**, és aztán a **fiúk** a **kenuversenyt**.
the girls won PRT yesterday the kayak contest.ACC, and then the
boys the canoe contest.ACC
b. ?A **lányok** meg-nyerték tegnap a kajakversenyt, a **fiúk** pedig a **kenuversenyt**.
the girls PRT-WON yesterday the kayak contest.ACC, the boys
whereas the canoe contest.ACC

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.

References

- Asher, N. & Lascarides, A. (2003), *Logics of Conversation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kálmán, L. (2001) *Magyar leíró nyelvtan. Mondattan 1*. Tinta Könyvkiadó, Budapest.
- (1985) Word Order in Neutral Sentences. In: *Approaches to Hungarian 1*, pp. 13-23. JATE: Szeged.
- É. Kiss, K. (2006) Focussing as predication, in: V. Molnar és S. Winkler (eds.), *The Architecture of Focus*, Mouton de Gruyter.
- (2002), *The Syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge University Press.
- (1995), *Discourse-Configurational Languages*. Oxford University Press.



1: Laboratoire de Linguistique Formelle (CNRS / Univ. Paris Diderot)
2: Research Institute for Linguistics Hungarian Academy of Sciences