



Az SZTE Kutatóegyetemi Kiválósági Központ tudásbázisának
kiszélesítése és hosszú távú szakmai fenntarthatóságának megalapozása
a kiváló tudományos utánpótlás biztosításával”



Topics in Focus Position in Hungarian

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Structural focus position in Hungarian (É. Kiss 1998, 2002, Kenesei 2006)

preverbal position

eradicating stress

exhaustive identification

conveys new information

V + postverbal material: presupposed information

(1) Péter MARINAK írt levelet.

P. M.-DAT wrote letter-ACC

‘It is to Mary that Péter wrote a letter’

„Hocus constructions” (Kálmán 1985, 2001)

the structural focus position is filled by a definite or indefinite NP

the postverbal material is stressed

the V + postverbal material convey new information

some subtypes are also called VP-focus, sentential focus or information focus sentences (É. Kiss 1998, 2007, Kenesei 1998, 2006)

Some examples

(2) Mari az ASZTALRA tette A TÁSKÁJÁT.

M. the table-SUBL put-3SG.PAST the bag-3SG.POSS-ACC

‘Mari put her bag on the table’

(3) Az OLASZ CSAPAT nyerte meg a VILÁGBAJNOK-
SÁGOT! (É. Kiss 2007: 78)

the Italian team win-3SG.PAST VM the world-cup-ACC

‘It was the Italian team who won the world cup!’

„Neutral identificational sentences” (Peredy 2010)

(4) János minden héten leszúrt. Megtehetette, hiszen Ő

J. every week told off could-3SG do since he
volt az IGAZGATÓ. (Peredy 2010: 159)

be-PAST.3SG the director

‘János used to tell me off every week. He could do it, since he was the director’

New information is conveyed by the postverbal material and not by the preverbal constituent.

(4’) ... *??Megtehetette, hiszen Ő AZ IGAZGATÓ volt.

he the director be-PAST.3SG

‘Idem’

Further examples

(5) - **Miről** híres ez a ház? ‘What is this house famous for?’

- ITT **született** **OSCAR WILDE.**

here be-3SG.PAST born O. W.

‘Oscar Wilde was born here’

(6) – **Ki** maga? ‘Who are you?’

– ÉN vagyok **az ÉJJELIŐR.**

I be-1SG the night-watchman

‘I am the night-watchman’

Question-answer incongruence (Krifka 2001)

A question-answer pair is congruent if the background of the question and the answer is the same and the answer fills in a constituent for the *wh*-word in the question.

(7) - **HOL** voltál ma reggel? ‘Where were you this morning?’

- **Az USZODÁBAN** (voltam ma reggel). (congruent answer)

the swimming-pool-INESS be-1SG.PAST today morning

‘(I was) at the swimming-pool (this morning)’

The question-answer pairs in (5)-(6) are (apparently) incongruent.

Questions

How to account for the information structure of sentences like the answers in (5)-(6)?

What is the pragmatic motivation of such constructions?

How to resolve the problem of the (apparent) incongruence between these constructions and the corresponding questions?

Some characteristics of these constructions

The preverbal constituent is usually a deictical/anaphorical expression.

(8) ÉN vagyok ZORRÓ, A RÓKA.

I be-1SG Zorro the fox

‘I am Zorro, the fox’

(9) ITT lakik a POLGÁRMESTER.

here live-3SG the mayor

‘The mayor lives here’

(10) EZ A LEVÉL volt az OKA A ZAVARGÁSNAK.

this the letter be-2SGPAST the cause-POSS the riot-DAT

‘This letter was the cause of the riot’

Some characteristics of these constructions

In a copular sentence, the postverbal constituent must be a definite (or specific) expression

(11) ÉN vagyok az/*egy/az egyik éjjeliőr.

I be-1SG the a one of the night-watchman

‘I am the/a night-watchman’ / ‘I am one of the night-watchmen’

Restrictions on the non-copular V:

(12) ÉN győztem. / pro győztem. ‘I won’

I win-1SG.PAST win-1SG.PAST

(13) ?? ÉN vesztettem. / pro vesztettem. ‘I lost’

I lose-1SG.PAST lose-1SG.PAST

Some characteristics of these constructions

They commute sometimes (but not always) with a classical topic-comment sentence

(14) – Ki maga? ‘Who are you?’

– ÉN vagyok az ÉJJELIŐR. / pro AZ ÉJJELIŐR vagyok.

I be-1SG the night-watchman the night-w.-m. be-1SG

‘I am the night-watchman’

(15) – Melyik szerepet kaptad? ‘Which role did you get?’

– ÉN lettem a FŐSZEREPLŐ. / ? pro A FŐSZEREPLŐ lettem.

I become-1SG-PAST the main character the m.c. become-1SG-PAST

‘I became the main character’

(16) – Miről híres ez a ház? ‘What is this house famous for?’

– ITT született OSCAR WILDE / *Itt meg-született O.W.

here be-3SG.PAST born O. W. here VM be-3SG.PAST born O. W.

‘Oscar Wilde was born here’

Some characteristics of these constructions

They are often equivalent with a classical topic-comment sentence in other languages (Gécseg 2012)

(17) Je suis la BONNE. (Ionesco: La cantatrice chauve)

I be-1SG the maid

(17') I'm the MAID. (English transl.)

(17'') ÉN vagyok a SZOBALÁNY. (Hungarian transl.)

I be-1SG the maid

'I am the maid'

Generalization

The preverbal constituent is
situationally/contextually bound

The sentence conveys new information about
the referent of the preverbal constituent



**The constituent in the structural focus
position functions as the topic of the sentence
on the pragmatic level.**

Definition of topic and comment (Gundel 1988: 210)

An entity, E, is the **topic** of a sentence, S, iff, in using S, the speaker intends to increase the addressee's knowledge about, request information about or otherwise get the addressee to act with respect to E.

A predication, P, is the **comment** of a sentence, S, iff, in using S the speaker intends P to be assessed relative to the topic of S.

Topics in focus position crosslinguistically

Informative-presupposition clefts (Prince 1978) or comment-clause clefts (Hedberg 1990, Delin & Oberlander 1995)

(18) It is through the writings of Basil Bernstein that many social scientists have become aware of the scientific potential of sociolinguistics. (Prince 1978: 902)

Continuous topic *it*-clefts (Kayne 1981, Huber 2002, den Dikken 2008)

(19) – Do you know Mary's book?

– Yes, in fact it was Mary's book that got me interested in clefts. (den Dikken 2008)

(20) – Who are you?

– *It is me who is the night-watchman.

Motivations

É. Kiss (2011) – quiz-question sentences

The new information itself is a fact supposed to be known by the hearer → it must be syntactically encoded as a presupposition

(21) - Ki az a Lee Harvey Oswald? ‘Who is L. H. O.?’

- Ő lőtte le JOHN KENNEDY-T. (É. Kiss 2011:257)

he shoot-3SG.PAST down John Kennedy-ACC

‘He (is the one who) shot John Kennedy’

(21’) – Ki az a John Smith? ‘Who is John Smith?’

– *Ő lőtte le a SZOMSZÉDJÁT. (É. Kiss 2011:257)

he shoot-3SG.PAST down the neighbour-POSS-ACC

‘He (is the one who) shot his neighbour’

(22) – Miről híres ez a ház? ‘What is this house famous for?’

– Itt született egy híres költő.

here be-3SG.PAST born a famous poet

‘A famous poet was born here’

Motivation: uniqueness

The presupposed status can be related to a definite description contained by the predicate.

(23) Q: Miről híres Kertész Imre? ‘What is K. I. famous for?’

A₁: 2002-ben pro MEGKAPTA az IRODALMI NOBEL-DÍJAT.

2002-INESS get-3SG.PAST the literature Nobel-prize-ACC

‘In 2002 he was awarded the Nobel-prize in literature’

A₂: 2002-ben Ő kapta az IRODALMI NOBEL-DÍJAT.

HE get-3SG.PAST

‘Idem.’

Presupposition of A₁ and A₂: there exists a Nobel-prize in literature

Pragmatic rules for Hungarian

1. If the topic of the sentence refers to a unique individual the comment of the sentence holds for, encode this referent in a structural focus position. (Gécseg 2013)

2. If the comment of the sentence conveys known or trivial information, encode it as the ground part of a focus-ground structure. (following É. Kiss 2011)

Apparent incongruence: example (6) again

(6) – **Ki** maga? ‘Who are you?’

– ÉN vagyok **az ÉJJELIŐR.**

I be-1SG the night-watchman

‘I am the night-watchman’

Mention-some answers

Surányi (2011, following Groenendijk & Stokhof 1984) –
„mention-some” questions

(24) How can I get to the railway station?

Topic-comment sentences encoded as focus-ground structures
are in fact „mention-some” answers → the ‘ground’ part is
interpreted as an information focus (Gécseg 2013)

(25) Q: Miről nevezetes Párizs? ‘What is Paris famous for?’

A1: (EZ) FRANCIAORSZÁG FŐVÁROSA.

it France capital city-POSS

‘It is the capital city of France’

A2: ITT található az EIFFEL-TORONY.

here can be found the Eiffel-tower

‘The Eiffel-tower can be found here’

A3: ...

Conclusion

A topic-comment sentence can (or sometimes must) be encoded as a focus-ground structure in Hungarian

Conditions:

- the comment must convey known or trivial information
- the comment must be a predicate that imposes a uniqueness condition to the topic referent

These constructions contain an information focus associated to the 'ground' part and are congruent answers to a „mention-some” question.

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THANK YOU!

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