

# The Analysis of Focus in Hungarian

## 0. Introduction\*

Hungarian has often been qualified as a language with free word order. For this reason, Hungarian is treated by most Hungarian linguists (Kiss 1987, Hunyadi 1985, among others) as a non-configurational language. Their conceptual arguments are based on the assumption that manifestations of surface word order within constituents do not correspond with differences in the relational structure. Within such a theory, projections of arguments are taken to be flat, and syntactic rules operate on this linear projection of lexical elements. The non-hierarchical ordering of constituents at D-structure is meant to account for the free word order. In conclusion: the claim for non-configurationality is primarily based on the relative freedom of word order. However, the hypothesis that Hungarian is a non-configurational language had already been rejected by several linguists (Horváth 1986, Marácz 1989).

In this paper I also argue against the non-configurationality of Hungarian phrase structure. The primary motivation for my rejection of non-configurationality lies in the theory itself. I would like to maintain that lexical material is projected in a uniform way from the lexicon onto the syntax, obeying a specific structural hierarchy of constituents. If the conclusion which was drawn by the Hungarian scholars were to qualify Hungarian as a language without constituent hierarchy, this would entail that a theory which has proved to be very successful in the analysis of a variety of other languages would have to be abandoned or changed, both fundamentally and descriptively, just because of the fact that Hungarian has relatively more freedom in word order than other languages. Such word order variation within a language is not in itself a reason for assuming non-configurationality. Dutch has a configurational basis, although it exhibits free word order within certain limitations. The same might hold for Hungarian, if the diversity of surface constituent orders can be derived by syntactic movement operations.

Hungarian is certainly not a free word order language in all respects. NP, AP, PP and DP not only have a more stable order, they also are clearly configurational maximal projections (Marácz 1989, Szabolcsi 1987). It is therefore justified to extend the analysis of NP, AP, PP and DP to VP and IP as well, so that these projections also receive a configurational analysis. In this paper I will demonstrate that the variation of word order in Hungarian is to a large extent a consequence of syntactic Focus movement. I shall argue that there is a functional projection Focus, which hosts focussed phrases. Focus thus has a structural position which has full categorial status in the sense of the X-bar theory.

## 1. The data

Let us now turn to Hungarian. In (1a) we have a neutral sentence, i.e. none of

the constituents is assigned Focus. The word order in such a neutral sentence is SVO. Various alternative word orders are possible, as in (1b)-(1e).

- (1) a. Tegnap János látta Marit (acc).  
Yesterday John saw Mary.  
b. TEGNAP látta János Marit.  
YESTERDAY saw John Mary.  
c. JÁNOS látta tegnap Marit.  
JOHN saw yesterday Mary.  
d. MARIT látta János tegnap.  
MARY saw John yesterday.  
e. Tegnap MARIT látta János.  
Yesterday MARY saw John.

The focussed constituent precedes the verb, but, as it can be seen in (1e), it need not be in sentence initial position. It may be preceded by a topic constituent. Hungarian is qualified by Horváth (1986), as an SVO language, although Marácz qualifies it as SOV. Object-NPs are always postverbal in matrix as well as in embedded clauses of neutral sentences. We qualify Hungarian as an SVO language. (Within the limited space of this article it is not possible to give full evidence to support the SVO word order.) Therefore, I would like to rely on Horváth's (1986) argumentation.

In our examples in (1) it means that any object-NP appearing in front of the verb is the result of movement out of its base-generated position to a position outside of the VP.

Focussing is, however, not limited to internal arguments as was recently argued by Stimpli (1990). In Hungarian, the focussing mechanism is more free. Several constituents with varying categorial status, such as the Subject or any other argument (DP, PP, AP) and also adverbs may be focussed. This "focussing freedom" give us in fact the answer to the question why Hungarian is qualified as a free word order language. But as we will see there are several restrictions on Focus assignment.

Only a single focussed constituent per clause is allowed, as can be seen in (2a)-(2b)

- (2) a. \*MARIT JANOS látta tegnap.  
MARY-acc JOHN saw yesterday.  
b. \*MARIT látta János TEGNAP.  
MARY-acc saw John YESTERDAY.

Unlike Focus, there is no uniqueness requirement on Topic. Both in main clauses and embedded clauses the focussed constituent may be preceded by more than one topic, as is illustrated by (3a)-(3b).

- (3) a. Tegnap este öt orakor a ház mögött MARIT látta JANOS veszekedni Annával.  
Yesterday evening at five o'clock behind the house MARY-acc saw John to quarrel with Ann-inst.

- b. Tudom, hogy tegnap este öt orakor a ház mögött MARIT látta János  
veszekedni Annával.  
(I) know, that yesterday evening five o'clock behind the house MARY-  
acc saw John to quarrel with Ann.

Of special relevance in the discussion of the syntax of focus in Hungarian are complex verb constructions, which are very common. These complex verbs consist of a verbal base and a particle or preposition, which modifies the state or action denoted by the verbal base. These constructions are comparable in their behavior to Dutch complex verbs, in that the particle may be separated from the verb. This separation in Hungarian interacts with Focus, as can be seen in the examples in (2). The presence of a focussed constituent is in complementary distribution with the preverbal occurrence of the particle.

(4) neutral interpretation:

- a. János fel-hivta Marit telefonon.  
John up-call Mary-acc on the phone-loc.
- b. János MARIT hivta fel telefonon.  
John MARY call up on the phone.
- c. MARIT hivta János fel telefonon.  
MARY call John up on the phone.

The following questions have to be answered:

- i) What is the structural position of Topic and why is recursion of Topics possible?
- ii) What is the structural position of Focus and why is recursion for Focus not available?
- iii) How can we give a satisfactory explanation for the complementary distribution between a focussed XP and the particle?

Before we answer these questions, let us take a closer look at the theory of Focus.

## 2. The notion of Focus: syntax and semantics

It is well-known that the intonational contour of a sentence varies as a function of the informational load of the various parts. We can distinguish between a neutral intonational contour and various non-neutral contours, which corresponds to differences with which certain parts are highlighted.

We may define the notion of Focus as the highest pitch-accent of the sentence. In discourse theory this means that a constituent in Focus contains new, unknown information for the addressee (cf. Lyons 1977). The correlation which holds between information-Focus and stress can be seen as an aspect of information structure.

Jackendoff (1980) proposes that Focus assignment in a language such as English can be analyzed in terms of an "invisible" movement after S-structure, hence as a movement in the LF component. The linear string thus remains unchanged under

different Focus assignments in English or Dutch, as can be seen in (5), taken from Jackendoff (1980), and (6). The focussed phrase is in capitals.

- (5) a. JOHN even gave his daughter a new bicycle.  
 b. John even gave his DAUGHTER a new bicycle.  
 c. John even gave HIS daughter a new bicycle.  
 d. John even gave his daughter a NEW bicycle.
- (6) a. Jan draagt een ROOD en Piet een ZWART overhemd.  
 John wears a RED and Peter a BLACK shirt  
 b. Jan slaapt ALTIJD in zijn eigen bed.  
 John sleeps ALWAYS in his own bed  
 c. Jan slaapt altijd in zijn EIGEN bed.  
 John sleeps always in his OWN bed

As in the case of WH-movement, languages may vary with respect to the level at which this movement takes place: what occurs at LF in one language may occur in the syntax in another. This is precisely what we see in Hungarian. Before turning to the phrase structural analysis of such focus movement, I would like to emphasize that syntactic Focus movement is not restricted to Hungarian. Syntactic Focus movement has recently been described for Chinese (cf. Hoh & Chiang 1990) and for an Indo-European language like Modern Greek (Tsimpli 1990). Tsimpli argues that only the internal argument of the verb may be focalized. In (7) I give one of her examples.

- (7) a. Edhose i Maria to vivlio sto Yani.  
 Gave-3s the Maria the-acc book to the Yani.  
 b. TO VIVLIO edhose i Maria sto Yani.  
 The-acc BOOK gave-3.s. Maria to-the- Yani.  
 c. To vivlio to-edhose i Maria sto Yani.  
 The-acc book it-gave-3.s. Maria to-the-acc Yani.  
 Maria gave the book to Yani.

The unmarked word order is VSO as in sentence (a). The moved object in (b) is in Focus, while the moved object in (c) refers to Topic. This corresponds to the facts that in (b) the phrase in Focus bears pitch accent, while the topicalized NP in (c) is not emphatic and accompanied by the resumptive pronoun.

### 3. Analysis

The starting point of our analysis will be that Hungarian is a language with syntactic Focus movement like Greek, and unlike English. From this view point, we can phrase the following generalizations with respect to the empirical facts presented in section 1.

- A: Focus movement is XP movement.  
 B: Focus is unique: there is only one structural position available to Focus.  
 C: If there is movement of a constituent into Focus, the complex verb construction is not available anymore. The verb must be separated from its particle. Hence there is a complementary distribution between a focussed

XP and the preverbal particle.

D: Topic is not unique: more than one constituent may undergo Topicalization.

A finite indicative matrix sentence has an S-structure string as in (8), while an embedded finite clause is as in (9):<sup>1</sup>

(8) TOP(s) FOC V-fin Arg.(s).

(9) hogy TOP(s) FOC V-fin Arg.(s).

Note that there is no difference in position of the finite verb between matrix and embedded sentences. I will come back to this point later.

The element *hogy* is a complementizer, and hence its structural position will be the head of CP. As we saw (in (3) above) the occurrences of TOP(s) are optional and recursive. We can interpret these facts structurally as the consequence of syntactic adjunction. The fact that TOP(s) follow C, indicates that Topic constituents are adjoined to the complement of C. The null hypothesis is to state that it concerns the maximal projection of INFL.

Not only can multiple Topics precede FOC, FOC is unique, as we saw. This can be accommodated by the theory if we assume that FOC structurally occupies the SPEC-position of a maximal projection. This assumption is in accordance with the Projection Principle. FOC cannot be a complement position, because positions of complements are present only as a consequence of selection in terms of thematic roles. This agrees with the fact that focus constituents may bear different Grammatical Relations. In view of the uniqueness of focus, the only theoretical option is to assume that this position is the [SPEC] of a Functional Projection. Unlike TOP, then, FOC is not an adjunction position. In view of the fact that the complement of C is an IP, we can define FOC as [SPEC,IP]. As we will see, this assumption has further theoretical consequences.

Our claim that Focus movement is movement to [SPEC,IP] entails that we consider this position to be an A-bar position. Hungarian differs in this respect from English in that the [SPEC,IP] position in English is reserved for the subject-NP, and hence this position is an A-position in the sense that nominative case is assigned here. Our claim concerning [SPEC,IP] is not unprecedented, however. Diesing (1988) argues for a dual status of [SPEC,IP] in Yiddish: it is an A-position if the subject raises to it, but an A-bar position if it is the landing site for movement of non-subject Topics. Before looking more closely into the nature of the Functional INFL Projection in languages such as English in comparison with Hungarian, I will proceed with the next step in the analysis.

Returning to our example under (4), and the complementary distribution of focus and the preverbal occurrence of the particle, a solution immediately suggests itself. The presence of a focussed constituent in SPEC indicates the presence of an INFL head position. We claim that the finite verb moves from its base position into the head position of IP. The V-to-I movement results in the separation of the verb and its preverbal particle. In (2a), there is no verb movement. This corresponds with the neutrality of the sentence: none of the constituents is focalized. Therefore, there is nothing that would "activate" the

IP level, hence there is no position available for the verbal head to move into. In (4b) and (4c), however, the constituent *John* occupies FOC, in (4b) preceded by TOP. Thus the presence of a FOC-constituent in SPEC triggers movement of the verbal part of the verb complex, leaving behind the non-verbal particle in the VP. This way of separating the verb and its particle is identical to what we see under movement to C in languages such as Dutch and German and under V-to-I in a language such as Yiddish.

#### 4. On the nature of functional projections

In the preceding section we made two claims about functional projections which may require some further elaboration. First, as already mentioned, the nature of the specifier of IP seems to vary: an A-bar position in Hungarian, and an exclusively A-position in English. Secondly, I suggested that the IP-level is not uniformly present in Hungarian, but occurs in function of the presence of focus.

It should be evident, however, that neither of these two assumptions is entirely novel. The notion of activation of a level is what differentiates languages such as English on the one hand from languages such as Dutch on the other: in the latter, CP is always present. This difference in clause structure between the two types of languages are based on what "activates" the CP-level. In English, the CP-level in main clauses is "activated" by a WH-word. In Dutch, on the other hand, the Tense operator may uniformly occupy the C-position, which therefore "activates" the CP-level in all main clauses. We may draw the conclusion that Functional Projections may differ among languages, due to their specific properties or roles. Consequently, they may also differ in their existence/non-existence across languages, as well as their presence/absence in particular constructions within a language.

Turning to I, we see that it functions quite differently in Hungarian as compared to English. It is in a sense somewhat confusing to use the same label (IP), if its content may vary across languages. We can use the same label if we assume that:

- i: There exists a Functional Projection that is external to VP
- ii: Some variations are permitted with respect to the specific function of Functional Projection.

Again, we establish that the content of [SPEC,IP] in Hungarian differs from the content of [SPEC,IP] in English. In English the nominative case is reserved for the specifier position of IP, which is certainly due to the presence of Tense in the head-position of IP. Therefore, one might also use the label: T(ense)P. In Hungarian, on the other hand, it is the Focus position. Hence, instead of using the label IP, we might call the projection F(ocus)P.

The availability of FP can now be seen as the presence/absence of the mechanism of focussing. This implies that as a result of the absence of focussing this domain will also be absent. The consequence of this implication has structural relevance, because indicative finite matrix sentences without focussing as well as complement clauses after *hogy* 'that', without focussing, in fact are VPs.

These VPs then reflect the neutral, unmarked word order.<sup>2</sup>

Our view on functional projections is that their nature depends on the feature specification of their heads: C in Dutch harbors a Tense feature, C in English (at least matrix C) harbors a WH-feature, thus forcing WH-movement in the syntax. Languages without overt WH-movement may lack a functional position harboring such a WH-feature to trigger movement in the syntax. English, on the other hand, differs from Hungarian in not having a functional position harboring a Focus-feature, and hence lacks syntactic focus movement. Is Hungarian a language with syntactic WH-movement? Note that this is not immediately evident, not even if we find sentences with moved WH-constituents, as these may instantiate focus movement, rather than WH-movement per se. Both Focus movement and WH-movement are movements into an A-bar position.

In order to determine whether or not Hungarian is a +WH-movement language we should look at the options of combining focussing and WH-questioning. It turns out that WH-movement and Focus-movement are mutually exclusive, suggesting indeed that they involve movement to the same position. This is illustrated by the ungrammaticality of (10a), in contrast with (10b).

- (10) a. \*Kit AZ UTCAN látott János.  
           Who street-loc saw John?  
       b. Kit látott János az utcán?  
           Who saw John on the street.

If a WH-constituent is present in the sentence, it has to move to the FOC-position, which follows from the quite natural assumption that in WH-questions, at least one WH-constituent will be focussed. It is impossible to claim that WH-constituents are inherently [+focus]. First of all, this would incorrectly imply that multiple interrogation is excluded in Hungarian. Moreover, other languages may combine the English and Hungarian options, and have both a functional projection for Focus and for WH-movement. Modern Greek apparently is such a language. In indirect questions, WH-movement and Focus-movement may take place simultaneously, each landing in separate landing positions, namely [SPEC,CP] and [SPEC,FP], respectively. Tsimpli (1990) argues that in Modern Greek matrix WH-questions also land in [SPEC,FP], while in embedded clauses the WH-word lands in [SPEC,FP] and a focussed argument may occupy the [SPEC,CP]:

- (11) Mu-ipe TO VIVLIO se pjon edhose.  
       me-said-3s. the-acc book to whom gave-3s.  
       "He said to me to whom he gave the BOOK.

This is not possible in Hungarian. Even in indirect questions the same situation obtains as described above: WH-movement and independent focussing are mutually exclusive, i.e. the WH-element moves into the FOC-position, following the complementizer. This is illustrated in (12a,b,c):

- (12) a. \*Kérdezem A KONYVET kinek adtad.  
           Ask-1p.s. THE BOOK-acc to whom (you) gave.  
       b. Kérdezem hogy kinek adtad a könyvet  
           Ask-1p.s. that to whom (you) gave the book

- c. \*Kérdezem (hogy) kinek A KONYVET adtat  
 Ask-1p.s. that to whom THE BOOK (you) gave

The fact that there is no specific [+wh]-complementizer is another indication that there is no syntactically relevant [wh]-feature in the language, in terms of which WH-movement could be triggered.

There is nothing which inherently prevents WH-movement from taking place in a domain in which focussing takes place as well, as can be inferred from relative constructions such as the one in (13):

- (13) Az auto [OP<sub>i</sub> amit [<sub>FP</sub> a *sogora* *TEGNAP* hozott [<sub>VP</sub> be t<sub>i</sub> külföldről ]] nem volt jó vétel.  
 The car that-acc his brother-in-law YESTERDAY brought in from abroad, was not a good buy.  
 'The car, that was brought from abroad by his brother-in-law, was a bad transaction.'

Relative clauses are introduced by a relative complementizer, which we take to be an agreeing C. The operator binding the variable in object position is now moved to [SPEC,CP], while FOC is occupied by the focussed adverb *tegnap*.

In summary, then, languages may vary in terms of specific functional features which are operative in the syntax. In the domain of facts discussed in this paper, two such features are relevant: [focus] and [wh]. If these are features of a functional head, they will trigger syntactic movements not found in languages in which these features have no syntactic status. English differs from Chinese and Hungarian in having a syntactically relevant wh-feature, Hungarian and MG differ from English in having a syntactically relevant focus feature.

## 5. Review of some alternative proposals

The FOC position proposed by Horváth (1986) is the preverbal position, the left sister of V in the VP. According to her, this position is only available as a landing site for FOC constituents if it is empty, and therefore the preverbal particle must first be adjoined to the right side of V. Note that movement into the pre-V/FOC position under V-bar violates the c-command condition and leaves an improperly bound trace behind. Movement into that position entails downward movement. The present analysis, however, involves upward movement and can satisfactorily account for successive cyclic movement in case of long Wh-extractions.

According to the analysis of Marác (1989), the effect of Verb-second is responsible for FOC position, which immediately precedes the moved verb. Hence moving an element into FOC will trigger V-to-C movement. The CP has to be recursive, however, because it must also host TOP(s), Q-expressions, the NEG-operator as well as the complementizer.

If TOP(s), FOC/WH, QP, NEG and the complementizer constitute recursive CP-projections, then it is not clear how to account for their surface order relative



to each other. Even if it is possible to locate FOC, the landing site of the other operators in the structure must be stipulated.

Another problem under the V-second analysis of FOC as V-to-C movement is why TOP(s) and Q-phrases may show up freely with particle-verb constructions. This must also be stipulated.

In addition, it can be demonstrated that taking [SPEC,CP] as the position of FOC makes the wrong predictions:

- (14)           Kit gondolsz, hogy JANOS hivott fel t ?  
                  Who-acc think-2p.sing, that JOHN called up.

In (14) the subject is moved to FOC in the embedded clause and the object is questioned through long-distance extraction. Under the CP-analysis of Marácz it means that a successive cyclically moved object has to pass two [SPEC,CP] positions: the Spec of the focalized argument and the Spec of the complementizer. Even if the [SPEC,CP] of an L-marked CP allows a chain to pass through a CP and extend into the matrix clause, nevertheless, two barriers may not be crossed in a single step (Chomsky 1986). The grammaticality follows naturally under our analysis.

## 6. Conclusion

Hungarian exhibits, certainly from an English point of view, a remarkably free word order. We have seen, however, that closer examination of focussing indicates that word order variations are not the result of arbitrary scrambling of constituents, but rather involve a strict hierarchical domain, characterizable in terms of X-bar principles. The head of this domain triggers verb raising, yielding an apparent verb-second effect, if we abstract away from optional adjunction of topic constituents. This verb raising is visible in verb particle constructions.

In discussing the system behind focussing we developed a certain view of linguistic variation, as determined by the syntactic relevance of certain features. Specifically, Hungarian was argued not to have a syntactically relevant wh-feature. This accounts not only for the absence of a distinct wh-complementizer, but also for the complementarity of WH-movement and Focus movement.

## Footnotes

- \*       I would like to thank Teun Hoekstra for his guidance and valuable advice, and Jeroen van de Weijer for helping me during the composition of this paper.
- 1       An infinitive may also occupy the [Spec,F] position.
  - a.           Mari elment vásárolni.  
              Mary away went to shop  
              'Mary went shopping.'

- b.                    Mari VASAROLNI ment el.  
                       Mary TO SHOP went away.
- 2     As a matter of fact, the complement of F (or of C in the absence of F) might be a maximal projection of some functional projection, e.g. AGR or Tense. I shall not explore these possibilities here.

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