What are we Speaking of?
A New Perspective on the Post-verbal Field in Hungarian[1]

Paolo DRIUSSI

Università degli Studi di Udine, Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici e del Patrimonio Culturale
paolo.driussi@uniud.it

ABSTRACT

Hungarian displays a characteristic syntax, that within the generative approach was called non-configurational. For this reason its description is at least unusual, and it cannot be taught with the same formal concepts used for most of the other European languages.

Functional approaches, with Functional Discourse Grammar among them, seem to be especially useful in both describing and teaching Hungarian, because they allow the interplay between pragmatics, syntax and semantics. This article sets the most important traditional assumptions about Hungarian syntax within the functional approach, concentrating on issues with word order. It is suggested that the so-called post-verbal field is very important. The central claim is that in a Hungarian sentence not only is the context of the expression recognized, given by the Topic and a possible Focus of communication, but also a distinct target of our discourse: a constituent signalling what we are speaking of that facilitates the making of the sentence.

Keywords: Hungarian; language production; structural-functional description; pragmatics; word order

1. Introduction

This paper deals with the pragmatic aspects that motivate the syntactic structure of Hungarian. Reflections suggested here are inspired firstly by teaching Hungarian as a second language, which leads also to the comparison of other languages, both with descriptive scopes and with the purpose of finding better correspondences in translation. While theories can explain specific grammatical constructions and

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1   I am indebted to Riccardo Giomi for his remarks on the draft paper, and to the two anonymous lectors for their valuable observations.

give detailed descriptions of them, in language teaching a more general picture of the language must be given to students. For these reasons all approaches to description and interpretation of sentences result in a number of different questions about the language. It is possible to summarise this by saying that what led to this research is the need for efficient communication. In order to achieve this complex target, the approach that is more convincing, especially for Hungarian, seems to be the structural-functionalist one. The theory adopted is Functional Discourse Grammar, which is very syncretic and efficient for the objective proposed here.

After introducing the target of this research as *fundamental issues* (2) in Hungarian syntax, the paper recalls the most important *theoretical* (3) points touched upon, and presents the *terminology* (4) adopted. The core of the paper suggests examples that reflect on some aspects of *Parts of Speech and phrase ordering in Hungarian* (5), driving the attention on the possibility that the functional approach proposed here can offer an essential and efficient description of it, allowing an insight of the post-verbal field that shows its importance, and especially that of the last component of the nuclear sentence. A main *output* of the research (6) is the introduction of the pragmatic function Catalyst, that is claimed to convey what the sentence is about.

2. Fundamental issues in Hungarian

Hungarian constituent order is a very interesting aspect of the language that puzzles scholars still nowadays. In the 19th century, Fogarasi (1838) demonstrated that the part of the sentence that the Speaker wants to emphasise, is placed immediately before the predicate. From the late 1970's Katalin É. Kiss wrote a number of works driven by the generative theory that put this statement in a wider context (É. Kiss 1978; 1987). The concept of the pragmatic function Focus, the part of a communication that is emphasised by the Speaker, now has an extensive literature.

Today we know that in Hungarian the disposition of the phrases is not motivated by morphosyntactic rules only, but – together with their semantics – by the pragmatic intentions of the Speaker, too. Two main rules that motivate the disposition of phrases and Parts of Speech (PoS) are recognised for Hungarian; rules that are recalled also by Naumenko-Papp (1987): (a) the Focus position precedes the verb; and (b) modifiers are always put before what they modify, either a word or a phrase. Rule (b) has been lately recalled by Hegedűs (2004, 2019) as one of the fundamental features of Hungarian grammar. A *modifier* can be defined here as any lexical item that restricts pragmatically and semantically the value of a PoS or a phrase. The most evident example is the attributive adjective that in Hungarian must always precede the noun it refers to.

While rule (b) is recorded in all grammar books at least within the scope of phrases, Focus is a function difficult to be grasped by traditional descriptions, and can only be handled using newer approaches. Similarly, another pragmatic function is important in Hungarian that is not always introduced in traditional grammar books, namely the Topic.

In the analysis of the Hungarian sentence, generative studies introduced the concept of Topic, recognising this function at the beginning of a sentence, followed by the Focus (if there is one) and then by the predication, and suggested that word order after the predicate is free. It was Varga who noticed the possibility of specific word order even after the verb: "But if among the Arguments placed after the verb there is also one that can be treated as new information, which can be emphasised, together with a known piece of information which is not to be emphasised, then the Argument to be emphasised can only be placed at the end of the Comment, not in its middle" (Varga 1981, 200. My translation PD). Such an approach fits well to a functional theoretical analysis of the Hungarian grammar, that takes always into account the whole language production issues, and is helpful for a pedagogical description of the Hungarian sentence, too. The results of the research presented in this paper suggest in fact that the last position of the nuclear sentence plays a fundamental role in the displacement of phrases, indicating what the Speaker is speaking of.

3. Theoretical frame

Therefore, the theoretical position assumed here is the functionalist one. For the purposes of analysing communication, it was useful to start with the studies about language production, and the renowned Levelt's model displays precisely the complex interaction of many factors acting on language production that is useful to point out when trying to give a comprehensive picture of discourse. Its model is explicitly referred to in the Functional Discourse Grammar theory (hence FDG), where it is applied to grammar in the strictest meaning of the study of the rules of language communication (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 7).

The FDG's model can be introduced with the graphic shown in figure 1. The picture summarises not only FDG approach, but also Levelt's model, in that it displays the important interaction between the many different factors that interplay in communication: the creation of the idea to communicate, the context in which communication happens and the final output of the communication.
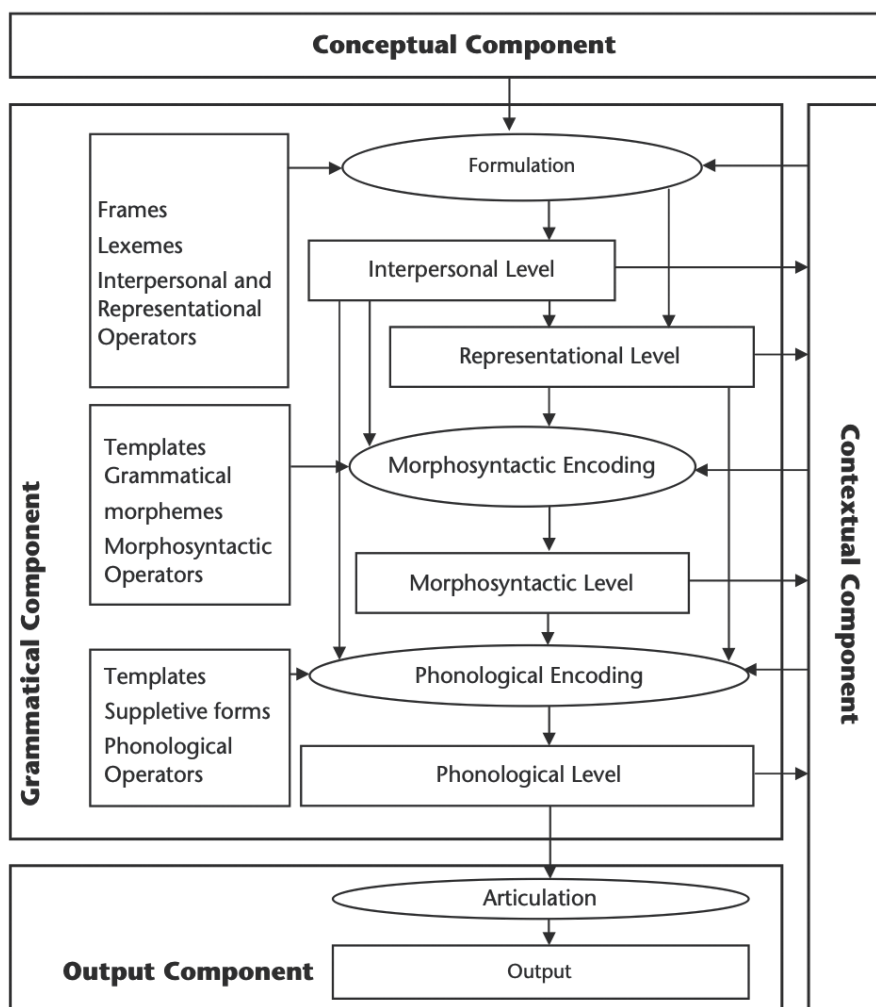
Figure 1: Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 13.

For the purposes of this article, it is important to retain two main points from the picture and from the theory itself. Firstly, in order to deal with the Grammatical Component, that for sake of brevity will be referred to as capitalized Grammar, it is necessary to recognize the complex interaction between this and the other components of the communication process, as well as between the different elements that are part of it: lexicon with semantic content, lexicon with grammatical content, different rules for different parts of the language. FDG recognises the primitive elements of language (in Figure 1 contained in the boxes on the left) and the processes (operations) necessary for the formulation of the communication, which are rule-based. Primitives are those elements that are the prerequisite knowledge for the use of language, such as the lexicon (both semantic and grammatical), the structures that some items presuppose, the required regency of verbs and adjectives, the semantic restrictions required by some words, and the functions of prosody, to mention a few. Hengeveld and Mackenzie (2008, 19) define them as 'building blocks'.

Secondly, within Grammar and within language production a necessary step for the analysis is the acknowledgement of hierarchies. As it can be seen from the graphic, the making of a communication is a top-down process, where the interpersonal level (containing the pragmatic functions) offers informations to be conveyed, that must be decided upon before the semantic choices made at the representational level, and the combination of the two allows the application of morphosyntactic rules necessary for realising the phonological chain that can be represented through the output offered to the Hearer.

4. Terminology

In order to avoid misunderstandings it is worthwhile defining general concepts that will be dealt with in the paper, together with some characteristics of the Hungarian language.

Simple definitions are needed for the concepts that are analysed, most of which are taken from the functionalist view as presented by Hengeveld and Mackenzie (2008), which is practical and coherent in itself and is useful here. A key concept is the Focus, a pragmatic function that "signals the Speaker's strategic selection of new information, e.g. in order to fill a gap in the Addressee's information, or to correct the Addressee's Information" (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 89). In Hungarian this is usually understood as the (piece of) information that is highlighted by the Speaker. The Topic function, as another pragmatic function, is that of signalling how the clause is related to the context, which must be intended as both the textual and the situational context. In FDG terminology "Topic function will be assigned to a Subact which has a special function within the Discourse Act, that of signalling how the Communicated Content relates to the gradually constructed record in the Contextual Component" (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 92). Therefore, in FDG the Topic function is expressed along the dimension of the Topic-Comment, and is not complementary to Focus. Many studies recall only partial functions of the Topic, that can be anyhow recognised all within the previous generic definition. It is possible to read a recognition of these functions in Tolcsvai-Nagy (2008). Ever since the works of É. Kiss, Topic in Hungarian is recognized as occupying the first position of the nuclear sentence. Given the fact that Topic and Focus are communicative elements that influence the clause structure, we must recognize that the Hungarian nuclear sentence is made of a Topic; a Focus, if required by the Speaker; and compulsory morphosyntactic elements prescribed by the predicate frame, i.e. the predicate and its Arguments. Topic and Focus may or may not be expressed by compulsory elements. This specificity of the nuclear sentence requires attention when considering the making of the communication. FDG recognises a third pragmatic function, namely the Contrast, on the dimension of Contrast-Overlap. The Contrast "signals the Speaker's

desire to bring out the particular differences between two or more Communicated Contents or between the Communicated Content and contextually available information" (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 96). According to FDG pragmatic functions can combine. This is a major difference with other theories: when a contrastive focus or contrastive topic is posited, FDG treats the constituent as bearing two distinct pragmatic functions, namely Focus and Contrast, or Topic and Contrast.

In Hungarian literature, the Focus is frequently explained by phonological means, considering word and sentence stresses (see Komlósy 1989, 172 and Hegedűs 2019, 72–73, for two different treatments of this approach). It is important to recall here also the case when the whole communicated content is assigned a focus, and no specific part of the sentence bears this function. These are considered thetic statements (presented in Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 89 with the relevant literature), and sometimes recalled as neutral sentences in Hungarian literature (this term is used for example in Hegedűs 2004). Put differently, thetic statements express a new piece of information as a whole, and can represent a point of reference in Hungarian, when paralleled with categorical statements. In fact, with bivalent verbs having an Argument signalled with Accusative there is a rule of thumb, according to which, in neutral sentences the indefinite object goes before the verb and the definite one after it, while the object indicated with an indefinite article can be found in either place.

A central concept used throughout the whole research is that of modifier, already introduced above. Again, FDG has a straightforward definition of modifier that can be used here: a lexical strategy that restricts a variable, referred to as Head (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 14). As signalled above, in Hungarian, when a lexical element has this role, it is placed before the variable that it restricts. Hegedűs describes this as the principle of left building, i.e. "*balra építkezési elv*" (Hegedűs 2004, 291). In this paper, it is claimed that all that precedes a PoS or a phrase can be considered its modifier, or restrictor, in a recursive way throughout the whole sentence.

Bearing these points in mind we can start our journey into the word order of Hungarian clauses.

5. The Hungarian language

5.1. Some principles of word ordering
Language specific characteristics to be recalled here are key factors in the study of constituent order in Hungarian, the first being precisely the position of Focus. Many scholars debated about word order in Hungarian, and did not understand the behaviour of constituents, until Fogarasi (1838) made it clear that it is not possible to explain this referring to the grammar of Latin, or trying to reduce it to morphosyntactic rules only. In fact, he explained that the emphasised PoS, the one highlighted by

the Speaker, must be placed before the predicate. We can now refine this by saying that the constituent in Focus in Hungarian is placed before the part of the predicate marked for tense, being the predicate a verbal or a nominal one. The analysis presented here became possible trying to explain the behaviour of verbal particles, in Hungarian *igekötők*, known in literature also as verbal prefixes. In fact these are usually placed before the verb as stressed affixes, but must separate in some cases and in others must be placed, unstressed, after the verb itself, sometimes separated as well. The main case for this displacement is precisely the introduction of a focused PoS, because this must be placed immediately before the part of the predicate marked for tense, that can be the verbal stem, without the affix.

In the following examples a highly simplified glossing is given (according to rule 4C of the Leipzig glossing rules) in order to highlight the features under discussion only, and the description of verbal particles is abbreviated with the subscript $_{ik}$, while subscript $_{FOC}$ and $_{TOP}$ placed before the constituent indicating Focus and Topic.

(1) *Megcsinálom.*
MEG$_{ik}$:I:do:it
'I will do it.'

(2) *Meg*   *kellene*   *csinálnom.*
MEG$_{ik}$ have.to;SUBJ   doing:I
'I should do it.'

It is suggested here that the verbal particle is in the Focus, placed before the verbal form conjugated for tense. This consideration is not widespread, but can be probably accepted by the end of this paper.

(3) *Ezt*   *csinálom*   *meg.*
$_{FOC}$this:ACC   do:I:it   MEG$_{ik}$
'I will do *this*.'

(4) *Nem*   *csinálom*   *ezt meg.*
$_{FOC}$not   do:I:it   this:ACC   MEG$_{ik}$
'I will not do this.'

As we can see, the verbal particle can behave in all possible different ways, being separated from the verb, preposed, or postponed and separated.

The second feature of the Hungarian language that must be explained is usually presented as modifiers that must be placed before what they modify. This is easily seen for PoSs, in that adjectives precede nouns they qualify, adverbs precede the word they modify or the whole clause, when referred to it.

(5) *A*   *kényelmes*   *szék*   *szép*   *is.*
The   comfortable   chair   beautiful   too.
'The comfortable chair is also beautiful.'

The adjective *kényelmes* is placed before the noun it is modifying, and this phrase is preceded by the definite article that modifies (or: restricts by recognising its definiteness) it all. Please note that the word *is*, both as adverb and conjunction meaning 'also, too', is placed after the phrase it refers to, being a relator, not a modifier.

(6) *Ez a   drága   bor   nem igazán jóízű.*
This   expensive wine not   really   good.
'This costly wine is not really good.'

The wine is specified (that is: restricted in its representation) as being expensive, and the 'expensive wine' is specified with the demonstrative pronoun, all modifiers preceding the modified part of the constituent.

(7) *S   tegnap   ilyenkor   ott   álltam*
And yesterday at.this.time ₍FOC₎there was:I
Montségur sziklavárának   legmagasabb omladékán.
Montségur rock castle:Px:DAT   highest   ruin:Px:SUPE
'And yesterday at the time I was there, at the highest ruin of the rock castle of Montségur.' (MNSz2: doc#362)

The adverb *tegnap* 'yesterday' refers to the whole communication (restricts the whole communicated content), and is placed before everything else. Here we have also two possessive constructions (*sziklavára* 'rock castle of' and *omladéka* 'ruin of'), in which the possessor specifies the possessed, and it is placed before it, a relationship that is also marked with the Px suffix. In Hungarian literature, *ott* 'there' has been recognised as carrying a special behaviour that makes it resembling a verbal particle (an in-depth discussion of it is found in Kocsány 2021). In this paper, a major claim is that verbal particles too are in focus before an item signalling tense, and therefore similarly in all cases when they are realised as stressed affixes. But in this case FDG also suggests a different interpretation, namely that what follows the verb is a Tail with an Orientation function (Hengeveld and Mackenzie 2008, 55). This reinforces the supposition that *ott* 'there' is in focus position signalling a "strategic selection of new information".

(8) *Az ítéletet   tegnap   végrehajtották.*
₍TOP₎the.sentence:ACC yesterday VÉGRE₍ik₎:carried:they
'The sentence was carried out yesterday.' (MNSz2, doc#362)

In this case the temporal adverb *tegnap* 'yesterday' only refers to the action, and therefore it is placed before it as a restrictor of its time of execution.

5.2. Variations on pragmatic functions: verbal predicates

We can now list some examples and reconstruct the way in which Hungarian builds up its sentences. Grétsy-Kovalovsky (1985) tell us that a sentence like

(9) *A   vihar   közeledett.*
    The   storm:NOM   approached:it
    'The storm was coming.'

has the usual "balanced word order that expresses an arid fact. This is even more true for clauses with nominal predicate: *A sas madár.* ('The eagle is a bird')" (Grétsy-Kovalovsky 1985, 885; My translation PD). Because of the use of a definite article, this single sentence is not really autonomous. The definite article pertains to something that is well known by both Speaker and Hearer, and this is only possible if they both can refer to a context or co-text. Because it does not need any special attention, when at the beginning of the sentence it simply allows the attention to be on what follows. In this case this constituent specifies the verb, filling its Argument with the due information. We can therefore imagine the verb as the incentive or the catalyst of the realisation of an item of communicative content. This somehow allows for an interpretation that is balanced, telling us about what's happening: something was approaching, and that something was the storm.

This paper will not deal with clauses that, like this one, offer the possibility of different stresses signalling different nuances in communication (see Komlósy 1989, 173), but only it focuses on a possible generalization of word ordering principles from a functionalist point of view. The same words of the previous example can be scrambled to make:

(10) *Közeledett   a   vihar.*
     Approached:it   the   storm:NOM
     'The storm was coming.'

At the beginning of the sentence the Hearer is given a totally new piece of information, which is the verbal predication. This predicate is used also to set the communication in the context, and is therefore a Topic. But because it is a predicate, according to language specific morphosyntactic rules it is unexpectedly put in this position, and therefore gets the special emphasis that can be recognised as Focus according to the definition given above: out of all things that can happen to a storm, the Speaker chooses to put special attention on the fact that it was approaching. Because what follows the Focus is definite, it is not a novelty. Therefore, the tension of the Hearer is maintained on the Focus. Again, it is possible to interpret this clause by saying that what is found at the end of the sentence is the incentive, the catalyst of the communication: the Speaker suggests that the clause is saying something about

the storm, and that what is specially conveyed about it is that it was approaching.

Grétsy and Kovalovsky (1985, 885) admit then that if we say

(11) *Vihar   közeledik.*
      Storm:NOM   approaches
      'A storm is coming.'

the Argument of the verb (what is usually treated as subject) receives a stress. What is placing the communication in context is a generic storm, something not definite, neither for the Speaker nor for the Hearer. This requires specific attention that is directed toward knowing why the communication is introduced in this way. Again, we can imagine that this is urged and catalysed by the predicate "was approaching", put last in the sentence. Therefore, something (or someone) is approaching, and in order to specify this we put what is approaching before the predicate itself. Because it is indefinite, contrary to example (9) we can consider it focused: in this case the generic initial constituent makes the clause unbalanced. Hegedűs (2019, 436) treats this Argument as a modifier of the verb. The results of this research strongly suggests that this approach is possible, in that the Argument of a lexical item specifies, and therefore restricts it.

Not much different is the case of

(12) *Egy   asszony   közeledett.*
      one   lady   approached
      'A lady was coming.'

In this case the subject is indefinite, i.e. not specified by the Speaker and certainly not known by the Hearer. Again, out of everything that can have approached there is a lady. According to Grétsy and Kovalovsky (1985, 885) there is a stress on *asszony* 'lady' that emphasises it. We have therefore a Focus here, that restricts (modifies) the predicate: out of what was approaching we have a lady.

Eventually the most neutral sentence made out of the same lexical words is

(13) *Közeledett   egy   asszony.*
      Approached:it   one   lady
      'A lady was coming.'

The predicate is in Focus being in first position, but the indefiniteness of the Argument places a special accentuation upon it that is equal to the one on the Focus. This balance motivates the thetic value of the clause.

5.3. Variations on pragmatic functions: nominal predicates

The same principles are true also for nominal predication, as recalled by Grétsy and Kovalovsky (1985). It is known that nominal predications at the 3Sg and in the present tense in Hungarian do not require a copula. Therefore, the structure of such a clause is parallel with that of monovalent verbs. It is interesting to list some examples because in these cases when we have two constituents the predicate is always the less definite of the two, and the interpretation as Focus realised syntactically is evident when the predicate is placed before its argument. This paper does not deal with Focus expressed by a phonetic stress on it, but only with its syntactic realisation.

(14) *Ő   Erzsébet.*
She   Elisabeth
'She is Elisabeth.'

(15) *Erszébet   az   orvosunk.*
Elisabeth   the   medical doctor-Px2Pl
'Elisabeth is our family doctor.'

(16) *Erzsébet   szakorvos.*
Elisabeth   specialist
'Elisabeth is a specialist.'

(17) *Az   orvosunk   (egy)   nő.*
the   medical doctor-Px2Pl   (one)   woman
'Our family doctor is a woman.'

(18) *Egy   nő   orvos.   (Két nő tanár.)*
one   woman   medical doctor. (two women teacher)
'One woman is a medical doctor. (Two are teachers.)'

(19) *Az   orvos   egy   tudós.*
the   medical doctor   one   erudite
'The medical doctor is an erudite person.'

(20) *Az a szék   kényelmes.*
that   chair   comfortable
'That chair is comfortable.'

(21) *Ez   jó.*
this   good
'This is good.'

All these are balanced narratives, and can easily become unbalanced by putting the predicate in the first place, and therefore the restrictive Argument after it. This will set the predicate in the Focus (and Topic) position.

For example:

(22) *Nő   az   orvosunk.*
_FOC_woman   the   family doctor:our
'Our family doctor is a woman.'

(23) *Kényelmes   a   szék.*
  FOCcomfortable   the chair
  'The chair is comfortable.'

(24) *Jó   ez.*
  FOCgood   this
  'This is (really) good.'

Hungarian nominal predicates suggest that a nominal hierarchy can be recognised that will help in more difficult analysis. It is worth noting that the definiteness trait is also important here. This hierarchy is comparable with those suggested elsewhere (e.g., Aissen 2003):

> personal pronouns > pronouns > nouns marked with possessive > proper nouns > nouns marked for definiteness > nouns marked for indefiniteness = adjectives.

Such a hierarchy can help quickly explain (and teach) not only the reasons of the previous structures, but also some other features of the Hungarian language.

5.4. The post-verbal field as a sequence of modifiers

A slightly more complex communication can give a better picture of what has been written until now, and allows clarification of many characteristics of the language. Let's consider the following clause, from Csukás (1975):

(25) *A   kiscsacsit   nagyon érdekelte   a   lakodalom.*
  The small.donkey:ACC FOCreally interested:it the nuptials,
  és   egy kicsit megrázta   a   szék   lábát.
  and slightly   MEGik-shook the chair leg.of.it:ACC
  'The small donkey was really interested in the nuptials, and shook the leg of the chair.'

We have two coordinated sentences. The common Topic is introduced at the beginning: *A kiscsacsit* 'the small donkey'. In the first sentence it is the second Argument (the one in the Accusative) of the verb *érdekelte* 'interested', and in the second sentence the coordinating conjunction confirms the Topic, which becomes the first Argument (the subject) of the verb *megrázta* 'shook'. This form is realised with the verbal particle *meg*, and because it is not separated, it means that there is no Focus. Or it is possible to interpret the verbal particle itself as a focus filling the gap in the addressee information about the realisation of the action. In the first sentence the Topic is followed by the verb (*érdekelte* 'interested') that is modified by the adverbial form *nagyon* 'very', which is in Focus. The last part is the first Argument (the subject *a lakodalom* 'the nuptials'). In the hypothesis proposed here, within the comment what initiates the communication and to which the Hearer can refer as the

pivot of the comment itself are *a lakodalom* 'the nuptials'. If it is the catalyst of the communication, applying rule (b) we can imagine that it is modified firstly by the verb: out of all things that can happen with 'the nuptials' they are '(very) interesting', and for whom 'the nuptials are very interesting' is the constituent that precedes, which therefore modifies these, restricting all other possibilities: 'the small donkey'.

In the second sentence the initial modifier (*egy kicsit* 'a little, gently') tells the Hearer that the attention is on the following PoS, which is the verb (*meg*)*rázta* 'shook', starting with a (stressed) verbal particle that indicates the absence of a Focus (or the highlighting of the action itself). In this case the modifier adverbial is referred to the whole sentence, not only to the verb. The verb is followed by a complex constituent: *a szék lába* 'the leg of the chair.' According to rule (b) the head is *lába* 'leg of it', which is modified by the previous word *szék* 'chair', and the whole is preceded by the definite article that modifies it. Again, beside the linear onward interpretation suggested in traditional approaches we can think of a backward one, namely that the pivot of the comment, the catalyst of the communication is the last constituent of the nuclear sentence, 'the chair leg that is shaken', and the whole thing is done gently by 'the small donkey'. This can sound unusual and against logic, but it is worth waiting for the last word to be uttered in order to fully understand what is being said, as students are always advised when practising translation and interpretation.

5.5. The last place in the sentence

An example of what was intended by the initial citation from Varga (1981) is offered by the scrambling of such a clause as "Stephen loves Maria", where the second Argument is marked for the Accusative with a *–t* suffix.

What is considered to be the neutral realisation is:

(26) *István   szereti   Máriát.*
　　 Stephen   loves   Maria:ACC
　　 'Stephen loves Maria.'

But we can have all possible combinations, with different Focus and Topic:

(27) ₜₒₚ*István* ꜰₒ꜀*Máriát szereti.*
(28) ₜₒₚ*Máriát* ꜰₒ꜀ *István szereti.*
(29) ꜰₒ꜀-ₜₒₚ*Máriát szereti István.*

What concerns us here, though, are the following two examples, where the two constituents follow the verb (that according to what has been previously stated can be considered both Topic and Focus):

(30) ꜰₒ꜀-ₜₒₚ *Szereti István Máriát.*
(31) ꜰₒ꜀-ₜₒₚ *Szereti Máriát István.*

According to Varga (1981), only if one of the post-verbal pieces of information is newer does it have to be placed in last position, otherwise the order is truly free. This corresponds also to É. Kiss's (1998) later contribution on the informational Focus. If we accept a backward interpretation, though, we admit that the Speaker has always been very clear about what the catalyst of the clause is; what constituent is intended to be shown to the Hearer as the pivot of the communication, and to be put in the last position of the sentence.

One of the examples given by Varga (1981, 200) is itself even more rich:

(32) *Szilveszterkor,   ahogy   szoktam,   megemlékeztem*
    New.Year's.Eve.time as   used:I   MEG$_{ik}$-commemorated:I
    a   Magyar Nemzetben   Petőfiről.
    the Magyar.Nemzet.newspaper:in Petőfi:about
    'As usual, on New Year's Eve I commemorated Petőfi in the
newspaper.'

Varga analyses the sentence saying that the newspaper is well-known by the reader, and the new information is therefore what the author is commemorating. In the suggested backwards interpretation, Petőfi is the starting point, of which is said that something happens in 'the newspaper', and what is happening is 'the commemoration', which takes place 'as usual, on New Year's Eve'. Again, it is possible to reconstruct the meaning from the last constituent of the nuclear sentence considering all previous constituents as modifiers. In this case, according to Varga, the Focus of the clause is the verbal particle. Such an interpretation seems to reinforce what has been stated in this article with a different approach.

6. Concluding remarks

Introducing the Catalyst function
What is suggested with this paper is that the Speaker always makes a choice about what to put in the last position of the nuclear sentence, a position that can be defined as the pivot of the Comment. It is therefore possible to recognize a Catalyst (CAT) pragmatic function for it.

Building the Hungarian sentence
The gradual construction of a Hungarian sentence can therefore be presented in the following way, and suggested graphically in figure 2:

The Speaker decides whether there is a Focus, a stressed part in its communication. If there is, then it stands before the part of the predicate marked for tense. If it is the predicate itself it stands at the beginning of the nuclear sentence.

After having decided for the Focus, the Speaker can decide about the Topic; the element that links to context. If there is a Topic it is placed in the first position of the nuclear sentence. It can also be the Focus.

Focus is present   Focus is absent

Foc   Pred

az egyetemen$_{Foc}$ *tanul*
the university:on$_{Foc}$ study:s/he
S/he studying at the university.

Top=Foc   Pred   Top=Pred
az egyetemen$_{Foc}$ *tanul*   tanulunk (együtt a konyhában)
the university:on$_{Foc}$ study:s/he   study:we   (together kitchen:in)
S/he studying at the university.   *We are studying*
                                                  (together in the kitchen).

Top   Foc   Pred   Top   Pred
Péter$_{Top}$ *az egyetemen*$_{Foc}$ *tanul*   *Péter*$_{Top}$ alszik a konyhában
Péter$_{Top}$ the university:on$_{Foc}$ study:he   Péter$_{Top}$ sleep:he the.kitchen:in
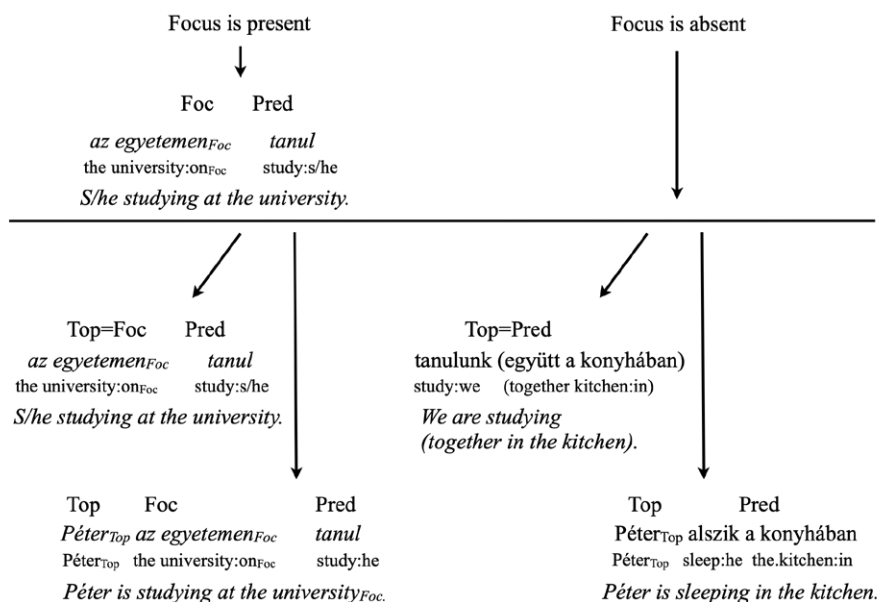*Péter is studying at the university*$_{Foc.}$ *Péter is sleeping in the kitchen.*

Figure 2: Construction of Hungarian sentences

At this point, most grammar books (Rounds 2001; Hegedűs 2019) suggest that all other constituents are positioned freely. It is proposed here to recognise that the Speaker makes one more decision about what can be defined as the pivot of the Comment, and can be imagined as what we are speaking of, which is the catalyst of the communication. This is put in the very last position of the nuclear sentence, and somehow is what the Hearer is waiting for. It is gradually modified by all that is preceding it. Whatever the Speaker puts in the last position is a key point of the communication.

This view relies greatly on the rule that modifiers are placed before the modified word or phrase. Among others, Hegedűs (2019) suggests that the Focus itself can be considered a modifier of the verb, and this reinforces the possible interpretation presented here.

It is worth noticing that in the last thirty-five years many scholars already dealt with this issue with a different approach. Works like the one by É. Kiss about identificational and information focus (É. Kiss 1998), or Gécseg's article on countertopic (Gécseg 2001) present situations that cannot be resolved by the Topic and Focus recognition only. In both cited works, special emphasis is given also to the last component of a nuclear sentence. In É. Kiss's paper, it can be the informational focus. Moreover, in most examples a major concern is the coexistence of more than one Focus or Topic. Because FDG allows for the compositionality of pragmatic functions, and among them counts also Contrast, many questions posed there find an easy explanation within this theory,

and, therefore, are not treated as problematic constructions. Instead, this study opted for the introduction of the Catalyst function because it seems that this component of the sentence can be justified with a specific syntactic rule (namely, being placed as the last component of the nuclear sentence), that must be applied once the Speaker decides upon it. The Catalyst function is always present in a sentence, and not restricted to the cases when it can be interpreted also as counterfocus, countertopic or informational focus.

Possible applications

Such a strictly structural-functional approach that combines syntactic and morphological rules with semantics can help also with other features, whose description can still be examined in depth, for example the function of verbal particles and the behaviour of PoSs that can be inserted between verb and verbal particle. Moreover, Komlósy (1989) signalled that some verbs force a specific behaviour, some of them abiding Focus position (*hangsúlykerülő igék*), some craving it (*hangsúlykérő igék*). This is another important issue in word order that is difficult to describe and teach, and probably has to be linked strictly to semantics.

The one suggested here is only one of the possible approaches to Hungarian word order, and two opportunities are offered. A first one is the possibility of better understanding interpretative nuances when translating. While in many cases it is believed that after all the feedback in most language can not reflect precisely all meanings, in practice a better understanding of the original communication can result in an adaptation of the communication in order to take advantage of the many pragmatic expressions of a language (see also Driussi 2020). Moreover, in teaching the interpretation of a sentence many situations can be simplified by suggesting such a 'backwards' reading of it. Quite interestingly, the fact that this analysis reflects, on the basis of Levelt's model, the production of communication can help in teaching the language in an active manner, giving not only rules for language interpretation, but also rules for speech production.

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