

When Hungarian word order is not so ‘logical’

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Hungarian is known to be a language where the relative scopes of operators can be read off surface structure, at least in the following syntactic configurations: i) in the — hierarchically structured — preverbal field, the surface order of operators correlates with their relative scopes; ii) operators situated in preverbal positions scope over postverbal ones (cf. Szabolcsi 1997 and É. Kiss 2002). The following sentence, with the main stress falling on the constituent in Spec,FP (the *identificational focus*, cf. É. Kiss 1998) can only have an interpretation where the latter takes wide scope over the postverbal universal quantifier:

- (1) [FP MANfrédet [VP köszönti fel minden szerző.]]
Manfred.ACC congratulates PV every author
‘Manfred is the person whom every author congratulates.’

Whenever the postverbal universal quantifier also receives stress, the nice picture gets blurred: a second interpretation arises, where the universal quantifier takes wide scope over the preverbal identificational focus:

- (2) [FP MANfrédet [VP köszönti fel MINDen szerző.]]
Manfred.ACC congratulates PV every author
possible reading: ‘For every author, the person he/she congratulates is Manfred.’

It is not entirely clear whether the reading paraphrased above is the only one available for (2). É. Kiss 1987, 2002, considers sentences like (2) unambiguous. Hunyadi 2002, however, discusses experiments showing that, without context, speakers readily interpret sentences like (2) the way they interpret their counterparts of the type in (1), i.e., with the postverbal quantifier getting narrow scope. (In the end, however, he finds it unnecessary to account for the observed ambiguity, claiming that his subjects do interpret the postverbal stressed quantificational expressions as taking wide scope whenever they are presented with proper context.) In what follows, I will only be concerned with how present-day theories account for the existence of the reverse scope reading of (2). Naturally, if systematically elicited experimental data show that sentences like (2) are ambiguous for a significant number of speakers, both of the most elaborated approaches to the issue, É. Kiss 1987, 2002 and Hunyadi 2002, to be discussed below, have to be reconsidered, since they predict the unambiguity of the relevant examples.

É. Kiss 1987, 2002 claims that the scope facts listed in i) and ii) above can be accounted for on the assumption that the scope principle of generative grammar — operators c-command their scope (É. Kiss 2002:113) — is observed in S-structure/spellout in Hungarian: in the preverbal field, each constituent c-commands the constituents preceded by it, and they all c-command the ‘flat’, verb-initial VP. She accounts for the ‘scope reversal’ characteristic of (2) by saying that quantifiers raise overtly before spell-out into preverbal positions available for them in order to get wide scope. Stress assignment happens in the PF component of the grammar, in the course of which, constituents in Spec,DistP obligatorily get stressed, whereas those in Spec,TopP get stressed only optionally. Then, a stylistic rule (in PF), ordered after stress assignment, optionally moves preverbal constituents preceding the first obligatorily stressed constituent of the sentence (the prefixed verb or the constituent in Spec,FP) back into the VP. This theory correctly accounts for a number of relevant facts. First, ‘counting quantifiers’ (those that are excluded from the Spec,TopP and Spec,DistP positions in Hungarian, see Szabolcsi 1997), cannot appear stressed in postverbal position at all:

- (3) * [_{FP} MANfrédet [_{VP} köszönti fel KEvesebb, mint öt szerző.]]
 Manfred.ACC congratulates PV fewer than five author

Second, it explains why quantifiers that legitimately appear in Spec,Top position (like *öt szerző* ‘five authors’) can get wide scope postverbally even when unstressed, whereas distributive quantifiers that can appear in Spec,DistP but not in Spec,TopP, like *minden szerző* ‘every author’, *öt szerző is* ‘even/as many as five authors’, *János is* ‘János, too’, and *legalább öt szerző* ‘at least five authors’, as in (4), can get wide scope postverbally only when stressed:

- (4) [_{FP} MANfrédet [_{VP} köszönti fel LEGalább öt szerző.]
 Manfred.ACC congratulates PV at.least five author
possible reading: ‘There are at least five authors for whom the person they congratulate is Manfred.’

Third, it accounts for the fact that stressed postverbal quantificational expressions in an embedded clause cannot take wide scope over a preverbal quantifier in the matrix clause:

- (5) [_{DistP} MArit is láttam, [_{CP} hogy felköszöntötte MINden szerző.]]
 Mary.ACC also saw.1SG that PV.congratulated every author
 ‘Mary is also a person whom I saw being congratulated by every author.’
 # ‘Every author is such that I saw her/him congratulate Mary as well.’

The theory makes some wrong predictions, too. First, it predicts that stressed distributive quantifiers of various types give rise to wide scope readings equally well when they appear postverbally. The contrast between (4) and (6) shows that it is not the case:

- (6) * [_{FP} MANfrédet [_{VP} köszönti fel TÖBB, mint négy szerző.]]
 Manfred.ACC congratulates PV more than four author

Second, it predicts that any grammatical sentence with a universal noun phrase in Spec,DistP will have a grammatical counterpart with the universal in postverbal position. The following sentence is ungrammatical, although its counterpart with the universal noun phrase in preverbal position is not:

- (7) * [_{FP} MANfrédet [_{VP} köszönti fel MINdenféle ember.]]
 Manfred.ACC congratulates PV every.kind.of person

Hunyadi’s 2002 theory is based on the idea that the relative scopes of equally stressed constituents are not determined by c-command relations, but by the relative positions of the two constituents in the following, independently given hierarchy, which he also uses for deriving well-formed prosodic structures by stress-reduction (Hunyadi 2002:90, with notation altered): verb < non-quantified NP and negative quantifier (for focus) < quantified NP and adverbial < sentential operator < cross-sentential operator.

On Hunyadi’s theory, the wide-scope reading of the postverbal noun phrase in (2) follows from the fact that quantified NPs are higher on the hierarchy than non-quantified NPs. This approach, however, does not predict any difference between (4) and (6). Also, according to the logic of his explanation, a variant of (2) with a counting quantifier in preverbal position, illustrated in (8), has to be considered truly ambiguous (given that the preverbal and the postverbal stressed constituents are on the same level of the hierarchy), as opposed to (2), which has to be considered truly unambiguous. Empirical data, however, show complete parallelism between the two cases.

- (8) [_{FP} PONtosan öt ünnepeletet [_{VP} köszönt fel MINden szerző.]]
 exactly five celebrated-person.ACC congratulates PV every author
possible reading: ‘Every author congratulated exactly five persons being celebrated.’

One possible way to derive the wide-scope interpretation of postverbal stressed quantifiers in

Hungarian could be to say that the sentences where they appear involve quantification into assertive acts at LF, along the lines of Krifka 2001. In addition to being able to derive the correct truth conditions for sentences like (2), this strategy would also explain why postverbal quantifiers in an embedded clause cannot take scope over a quantifier in the matrix clause, as in (5).

One problem for this line of thought would be the availability of wide-scope readings for noun phrases with non-universal determiners, as in (4), in view of the fact that non-universal quantifiers cannot be reduced to conjunction, the only operation interpreted for speech acts according to Krifka 2001. There still seems to be some hope left: the fact that two classes of expressions with identical interpretations as generalized quantifiers do not equally give rise to wide scope readings, as shown in (4) vs. (6), might also indicate that stressed postverbal noun phrases are not interpreted as generalized quantifiers in the sentence type under investigation, and that there are more similarities in the behaviour of noun phrases like *legalább öt szerző* 'at least five authors', *János is* 'John, too', and *minden szerző* 'every author' than it appears at first sight.

Another problem for the above suggestion appears to be that certain quantificational noun phrases can only give rise to wide scope readings in postverbal positions if they receive stress, which lends them an appearance of foci, which makes it unlikely that they function as the topics of their sentences at the same time. Given that on Krifka's 2001 theory only topics can induce speech act conjunction, these data would very much speak against our preliminary proposal, unless a way is found to combine their apparent focal character with the properties of topicality...

References

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