Features and templates in a configurational approach to the syntax/discourse interface

1. Objective This paper presents an account of discourse-related movements in Hungarian – a language well-known for its highly articulated left-periphery (1) – which holds that the complex pattern of discourse-related movements arises from the interaction of locally compositional interpretive rules formulated in terms of relative configurations (templates). In its account of discourse-related movements, the model avoids relying on fixed, absolute positions in the hierarchy of designated functional heads. Instead, the notion of (relative) configurations is exploited in the mapping from syntax to discourse representation (e.g., Neelleman and Koot 2008; cf. Diesing and Jelinek 1995). Such an approach can avoid the (problematic) postulation of uninterpretable discourse features on functional heads (see Chomsky 2008), while preserving the autonomy of syntax. The essential economy metric in (2) (subsuming cases where prior to the establishment of the movement dependency the syntactic representation is uninterpretable) automatically extends to all movements on the assumption (of minimalism) that all operations are fundamentally optional.

2. Proposal 2.1 Building on Kiss (2008), I adopt (6) as the structure of the clause in Hungarian. PredP, normally housing a particle/secondary predicate in its specifier (Koster 1994), corresponds to a core proposition, which T turns into a tensed sentence (a proposition anchored by tense). Phi-features of T are satisfied by overt verb movement. The “EPP” property of T pulls up the closest c-commanded phrase to its Spec position (à la Holmberg 2000). In neutral clauses, the closest phrase is the XP in Spec-PredP (normally a particle/secondary predicate) (7a); in negated clauses, it is the negation, adjoined to PredP (a propositional category) (7b). 2.2 The interpretive rules in (4) and (5b–c) operate on the templates in (3a) and (6a), respectively (see Neelleman and Koot 2008 for similar templates). (4) turns α into a logical predicate predicating of β (see a.o. Higgins 1979, Mikkelsen 2004, Kiss 2006; formally, (4) involves a type shift operation). The feature [foc] is interpretable only through (4). As a result, if some XP bears [foc], then it must undergo movement. I follow Irurtzun (2006) in taking focus to syntactically re-project after movement (see Hornstein and Uriagereka 2002, cf. Starke 2001), creating precisely the configuration in (3a). If there is a focus in the clause, then raising this focus to Spec-TP is more economical than moving up the XP closest to T, because this simultaneously satisfies T’s EPP property (see (8)), and renders [foc] interpretable through re-projection (due to (4)), the latter of which would otherwise require an extra movement operation. Negation can adjoin to [foc]P too, as the predication in focusing itself yields a proposition.

3. Predictions 3.1 Note that (4) does not specify the overt/covert status of <α,[foc]>, hence, unless independent properties of the language favor overt realization (as in the case of focus in Spec-TP), the movement of focus remains covert. Second (and third) focus in Hungarian behaves accordingly (9).

3.2 If (3a) is Merged with another focus, as in (3c), then (4) results in an inconsistent interpretation (each sister is predicated by the other). Instead, [foc]P in (8) cannot have a second focus specifier (*FOC FOC V), and a postverbal focus cannot covertly move (hence scope) over the preverbal focus (10). For the same reason, a preverbal focus cannot be preceded by another focus even if it is separated from it by adverbials, raised universal quantifiers or fronted topics, given that all of these elements are merged in by adjunction, i.e., without changing the label of the host category. 3.3 V-focus is an exception from the obligatoriness of focus movement, posing a problem for mainstream accounts of syntactic focus in Hungarian. On present assumptions, the position of V[foc] is the same as that of non-focused V because V undergoes movement independently to T, where its [foc] feature can re-project, yielding the configuration in (3a) (see (3b)). 3.4 DPs (and some other XPs) can freely undergo Scrambling inside PredP, a reordering without any discourse-effect (see Kiss to appear). If Scrambling leaves the proposition, (5b) applies. If Scrambling leaves the tensed sentence (i.e., if a DP moves above TP), (6c) is employed. A correct prediction is that a DP Scrambled anywhere above PredP (i.e., even above a preverbal focus) in an infinitival clause will be under the effect of (6b), but not (6c). 3.5 (3a) is a subcase of (5a), with β of (3a) corresponding to α of (5a). It is predicted – correctly, in view of the existential presupposition incurred by identificational focus – that β of (3a) will be presuppositional. As expected, a second, postverbal focus must also be part of the presupposition. 3.6 Topics cannot follow a preverbal focus. This is because an element can be interpreted as (an aboutness) topic only through (5e), which a post-focus topic cannot possibly satisfy, being inside TP. 3.7 Discourse-old DPs do not have to raise out of the propositional category PredP (cf. Hoop 1992), because discourse-old status is a property existing independently of (5b).
(1)  a. $\text{TopP}^{*} \left[ \text{DistP}^{*} \left[ \text{NegP}^{*} \left[ \text{FocP}^{*} \left[ \text{NegP}^{*} \left[ \text{PredP}^{*} \left[ \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right] \right] \right] \left[ \ldots \right]$ (Puskás 2000, Szabolcsi 1997, É. Kiss 2002) (* marks recursive projections)

(2) Optional operations can apply only if they have an effect on outcome (semantic interpretation). (Chomsky 2000, 2001: 34; see Fox 2000, Reinhart 2006)

(3)  a. $\langle [\text{foc}] \rangle$  b. $\langle V, [\text{foc}] \rangle$  c. $\ldots$

(4) *Focus Rule* for (3a): Interpret $\beta$ as predicated of by $\alpha$.

(5)  a. $\beta$  b. If $\beta$ is a proposition, $\alpha$ is overt, then $\alpha$ is discourse-old/presuppositional.

(6)  a. $\text{TP} \left[ [\text{T V}] \left[ \text{PredP} \left[ \text{Pred V} \left[ \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right]$  b. $\text{TP nem} \left[ [\text{T dobja}] \left[ \text{PredP} \left[ \text{Pred dobja} \left[ \ldots \text{a szemetet} \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right]$  c. $\ldots$

(7)  a. $\text{TP nem} \left[ [\text{T dobja}] \left[ \text{PredP} \left[ \text{Pred dobja} \left[ \ldots \text{a szemetet} \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right]$  b. $\text{TP nem} \left[ [\text{T dobja}] \left[ \text{PredP} \left[ \text{Pred dobja} \left[ \ldots \text{a szemetet} \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right]$  c. $\ldots$

(8)  a. $\text{TP} \left[ [\text{foc}] \right] \left[ [\text{T V}] \left[ \text{Pred P} \left[ \text{Pred V} \left[ \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right]$  b. $\text{TP nem} \left[ [\text{foc}] \right] \left[ [\text{T V}] \left[ \text{Pred P} \left[ \text{Pred V} \left[ \ldots \right] \right] \right] \right]$  c. $\ldots$

(9) EZT A DIÁKOT mutatta be mindenki KÉT TANÁRNAK

this student-acc introduced Prt everybody-nom two professors-dat

‘It’s this student that everybody introduced to TWO professors.’

every > TWO, TWO > every

(10) KÉT DIÁK látta EZT A FILMET

two students saw this film

‘It’s TWO students that saw THIS film.’

*‘It’s THIS film that TWO students saw.’

Selected references


