

**WORD ORDER IN
HUNGARIAN:
THE SYNTAX OF A-POSITIONS**



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*Dear Dr. Latsis,
Dear Professor Thorens,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Today, I have the honour and the pleasure of presenting my doctoral dissertation, in the field of linguistics. Linguistics is in fact a very wide and prolific domain, which is defined as the "scientific study of language", but which includes very many different approaches to this study of language.

1. Introduction

The framework I work in is what is called "generative grammar", an approach to the study of language initiated in the early 50's, under the leadership of Noam Chomsky (see e.g. Chomsky 1986). The generative grammar program takes as a starting point the hypothesis that a speaker's internal knowledge of his native language does not result from the exhaustive acquisition of a set of possible - or grammatical - sentences in his language. The assumption is that human beings are equipped with a system of knowledge which enables them to create and understand an infinite number of sentences. Given the poverty of stimulus small children have to face when acquiring their native language, and under the evidence that there is no formal teaching, it is proposed that a large part of this system is innate: human beings have a genetic endowment that enables them to acquire a language. How can we characterise this innate capacity for language learning, which must enable one to learn any language of the world?

Languages contain a set of principles which appear to be universal: they are said to be part of universal grammar. In the Chomskian perspective, universal grammar is innate to human beings: we are born equipped with a set of universal linguistic principles. However, each of the languages of the world has specific properties which distinguishes it from other languages. Generative linguistics

aims at formulating the principles which determine the grammars of human languages, both as resulting from universal grammar principles and from language-specific variations. In other words, it will try to make explicit the system of principles that underly each speaker's linguistic competence. Therefore, a comparative approach to the study of languages (as the visible result of a speaker's knowledge) seems to be the most promising way to reach this goal.

2.A study of the "left periphery"

My work is part of this generative program, as a study of the "left periphery" of the sentence, that is, approximately, the part of the sentence which precedes the subject in most languages. As the positions belonging to the left periphery do not concern initially the arguments of the verb, they are referred to as non-argumental positions, noted A. My research concentrates mainly on Hungarian, since this language uses extensively the left peripheral positions. However, as will become clear from the examples I will give you, appears that this left periphery is used in numerous other languages, at least partially.

Many languages, both Indo-European and non-Indo-European, show a subject-verb-object word-order:

- (1) a. *French* Jean aime Marie
- b. *English* John loves Mary
- c. *Gungbe* Sêna xia wema lô
 Sêna read book the
 'Sêna read the book.'

Hungarian declarative sentences can have the same order:

- (2) János szereti Marit
 John-nom loves Mary-acc
 'John loves Mary.'

However, this type of utterance is less frequent than in other languages. Many of the discursive functions, like questions or negation, involve a variable word-order, where the verb is preceded by a certain number of elements and where the subject can follow the verb. Various proposals have been made in recent years which argue that the segment which precedes the verb in these non-declarative sentences is structurally constrained. In this study, I show that there are indeed constraints and, moreover, that these constraints result from a highly hierarchic and strict structure, which involves a great number of fixed positions realising specific functions.

3. Focalising

The fact that in Hungarian, the sentence-initial positions are widely used allows us to determine different types of functions linked to the left periphery. The most prominent one is *focalising*. Focalising, that is the contrastive or emphatic underlining of an element in the sentence, is widely used cross-linguistically. However, it does not always rely on a specific word-order. This is the case for French:

- (3) a. Jean aime MARIE
b. *MARIE Jean aime.

In French, focalisation is realised in the intonation, as in (3a). The ungrammaticality of (3b) shows that French cannot use a strategy in which a focalised element is moved to a different position in the sentence; more precisely, it cannot be preposed to the left periphery. Other languages, like English (to a certain extent), Italian or Greek, have both options:

- (4) a. John gave a book TO BILL.
b. TO BILL John gave a book (and not to Mary).

- (5) a. Maria ha dato un libro A GIANNI
'Marie has given a book TO GIANNI.'
b. A GIANNI Maria ha dato un libro.
'idem'
- (6) a. Dhanisan to VIVLIO sto Petro.
lend-3pl the-acc book to Peter
'They have lent the BOOK to Peter.'
b. TO VIVLIO dhanisan sto Petro.
'idem'

In these languages, focalisation can either be expressed by a focal stress on the element in the sentence, or by moving it to the left. In Hungarian, only the preposing strategy is available:

- (7) a. JÁNOSNAK adott Mari egy könyvet.
John-dat gave Mary-nom a book-acc
'Mary gave a book TO JOHN.'
b. *Mari adott egy könyvet JÁNOSNAK.

Focus "in-situ", as in (7b), is ungrammatical. Besides, the focalised element must be adjacent to the verb. Therefore, I adopt a structure of the sentence in which the focalised elements appear in a functional projection FP (Focus Phrase) which belongs to the left periphery. To account for the subject-verb inversion, that is the obligatory movement of the verb as well, I propose a revised version of the Focus criterion:

- (8) **Focus criterion**
a. A [+f] X^0 must have the head of a chain which contains a focused phrase in its spec.
b. A focused phrase must be in a chain whose head is in the spec of a [+f] X^0 .

This enables me to work in terms of structural relations between elements, and hence to give a systematic account of the restrictions on focalising.

The study also examines the conditions on the extraction, that is the preposing from an embedded clause, of focalised elements. The most prominent property is the quantificational nature of focus, as it was already observed in the literature, and which underlines the parallel with questions.

The focus domain within the left periphery is presented as a non-uniform domain, where different types of elements can appear (quantifiers, 'also'-type elements), in a given order and following given constraints:

- (9) a. János Marinak is mindig KÖNYVEKET hoz..
 John-nom Mary-dat also always books-acc brings
 'John always brings BOOKS also to Mary.'
- b. *KÖNYVEKET Marinak is mindig hoz.
 books to Mary also always brings
- c. *Mindig Marinak is KÖNYVEKET hoz.
 always to Mary also books brings

The order in (9a), that is 'also'-type, universal quantifier, focus, is fine. Any other ordering (9b,c) is ungrammatical.

All these elements share a quantificational content, as well as wide scope properties. In addition, the scope hierarchies are also determined within the domain. Therefore, I propose to consider this domain as a scope field and to extend the Focus phrase presented above into a "split Focus Phrase", comprising several functional projections, each with its specific role in the domain.

4. Wh-questions

The *interrogative* function follows the same type of restrictions: an interrogative element can appear only left -adjacent to the verb, in a preposed position:

- (10)a. Kit láttaál ?
 who-acc you-saw ?
 'Who did you see?'
- b. *Láttaál kit ?

As the interrogative -or *wh*- elements must appear in the preverbal position, they occupy the same functional projection as focalised elements: they are mutually exclusive:

- (11)a. kit látott Mari Jánossal?
 who-acc saw Mary-nom John-instr
 'Who did Mary see with John?'
- b. *MARI kit látott Jánossal?
 MARY who saw with John?'
- c. *kit MARI látott Jánossal?
 who MARY saw with John?'

They are therefore constrained in the same way as focalised elements and subject to the *wh*-criterion as given in Rizzi (1991).

The well-known properties of embedded questions, among others the fact that the *wh*-element must appear after the complementiser introducing the embedded clause and other possible elements in the left periphery are examined in the perspective of a rich left peripheral domain. I propose that the selection by the main verb operates not on the first projection of the embedded clause, but on one of them. In Hungarian, this projection is FP, the focal projection.

The study also discusses multiple *wh*-questions, in a comparative approach with multiple questions in Slavic languages and Rumanian:

- (12)a. Hungarian Ki mit látott?
 who what saw
 'Who saw what?'
 b. Bulgarian Koj kakvo ti e kazal?
 who what you has told
 'Who told you what?'
 c. Serbo-Croatian Ko Koga vidi?
 who whom sees
 'Who sees whom?'
 d. Czech Kdo kdy koho pozval, nevim?
 who when whom invited, I don't know
 'who invited who when, I don't know'
 e. Rumanian cine ce a spus?
 who what has said
 'who said what?'

All these languages show a multiple preposing of the *wh*-elements (or question words). The systematic comparison of the properties of multiple questions in these languages shows that a split CP approach, that is of a rich but strictly hierarchical left peripheral domain, can account for similarities and differences between these languages with a minimal set of variations.

5. Negation

Negative elements in Hungarian use partly the same strategy. In most languages, negative elements do not move:

- (13)a. Jean n'a vu personne.
 b. *Personne Jean n'a vu.

- (14)a. John didn't see anybody.
b. *Anybody John didn't see.

In Hungarian, negative elements can be preposed, similarly to focalised or *wh*-elements:

- (15)a. János nem látott senkit.
 John-nom neg saw nobody-acc
 'John didn't see anybody.'
b. Senkit nem látott János.

Under the assumption that the negative *nem* forms a unit with the verb, we can observe the same adjacency requirements between the negative element and the verb as in the case of focalising or interrogatives. I propose therefore that in (15a), the negative element occupies the functional projection responsible for negation, NegP. This functional projection appears inside the predicational part of the sentence. The Neg-criterion as proposed in Haegeman (1995), which accounts for the restrictions in the positions of negative elements, is checked at this level. In (15b), where the negative element is preposed, I conclude that it appears again in FP, in the left periphery, and moves for focus reasons.

6. Quantificational value

Focalised, interrogative and negative elements have the same kind of function, namely determining the type of the sentence. They are therefore taken as operators which have a quantificational value. In Hungarian, these operators must appear in the left periphery. The fact that in this position the different elements are incompatible with one another argues in favour of one and the same position:

- (16)a. *Kit JÁNOS látott?
 who-acc John-nom saw
 'Whom JOHN did see?'
- b. *senkit JÁNOS nem látott.
 nobody-acc John-nom neg saw
 'Nobody JOHN saw'.
- c. *Kit senki nem látott?
 who-acc nobody-acc neg saw
 'Whom nobody didn't see?'

These operators are all quantificational elements whose overt position defines their scope:

(17) *Quant. OP*

Foc

Interrog verb [*predicational part of the sentence* (subject)
 etc]

Neg

7. Topicalisation

The study also examines another part of the left periphery which deals with *topicalisation*. Topicalisation is present in many languages:

- (18)a. Jean, je l'ai vu.
 b. Il libro, Gianni l'ha visto
 'the book, John saw it'.
 c. To John, I gave a book.
 d. To vivlio to-edhose i Maria sto Yani.
 the book it-gave- the Mary to John
 'The book, Mary gave it to John'.

In all these cases, topicalisation involves the left periphery. Indeed, the topicalised element precedes the subject and the verb. However, as opposed to focalising, topicalisation does not create emphasis or contrast. Rather, it represents some kind of presupposition, of which the rest of the sentence gives the comment. In Hungarian, topicalised elements also appear in the left periphery. As opposed to some languages (like Italian, for example), topicalised elements can only precede focalised elements:

- (19)a. Marinak a könyvet TEGNAP adta János.
 Mary-dat the book-acc yesterday gave John-nom
 'To Mary, John gave the book YESTERDAY.'
- b. Top (Top) Foc verb subject

Although several elements can be topicalised in Hungarian, as in Italian or in Greek, the topicalised element is not doubled by a pronoun, contrary to Italian or to Greek:

- (20)a. a könyvet MARINAK adta (*öt) János.
 the book to Mary gave (it) John
- b. Il libro, Gianni l'ha visto
 the book, Gianni it saw.
- c. To vivlio **to**-edhose i Maria sto Yani.
 the book it-gave Mary to John

I propose that in Hungarian, a null pronoun fills the same function as the visible pronoun in Italian and Greek. This empty pronoun is licensed by the morphological case on the topicalised element. A comparison with Bosnian, a language with rich morphological case like Hungarian and which can have overt pronouns, but which does not use them in topicalisation, corroborates this hypothesis:

- (21) Tvoj roman citam
 your novel-acc I-read
 'Your novel, I read.'

The extraction tests from a subordinate clause show that topicalisation differs from focalising in Hungarian, as it was proposed for Italian in Cinque (1990): topicalisation is not quantificational, but indeed "referential" (the "specific" interpretation of topics was already discussed in E-Kiss 1987, 1992). We can therefore extend our left periphery in the following way:

- (22) *Ref Quant. OP*
 Foc
 Top Interrog verb [*predicational part of the sentence*
 (subject) etc]
 Neg

8. Conclusion

To conclude, the fact that Hungarian includes so many elements in the left periphery distributed in such a hierarchic way leads me to propose that this part of the sentence is structurally elaborate. Using the articulated left periphery (split CP) of Rizzi (1995), I therefore propose that Hungarian has a rich system of functional positions which correspond to specific functions in the sentences, within the left periphery. These positions group into sub-systems, as the focal -or-scope- field and the topic field.

Although this apparently makes Hungarian an exceptional case, there are many reasons to think that other languages use the functions described above, at least partially. Italian shows topicalisation constructions which are at least as elaborate as the Hungarian one. Although English allows only for one topic, the preposing of adverbs with a topic interpretation is also possible. Again, although the preposing of a focalised element in French is prohibited, one might suggest that there is an invisible operator in the left periphery which allows for the focus interpretation. As Hungarian shows visibly all these scope phenomena, a detailed and systematic study of the properties of this language is very rewarding. However, it seems reasonable to think that other languages have the same structures, as they have the same discursive properties. The study of Hungarian can be seen as a tool for the study of other languages, in view of an adequate description of the general principles underlying linguistic knowledge. The comparative approach adopted here is a first step toward this goal.

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