

Word order effects of givenness in Hungarian: A prosody driven approach

To be considered for: oral presentation

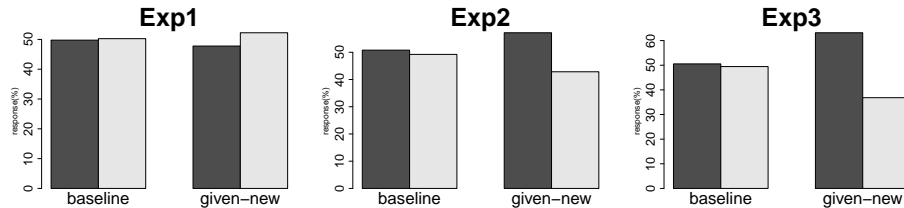
Introduction: This study investigates the effects of givenness on post-verbal constituent order in Hungarian, and it argues that a prosody driven approach explains its findings better than syntax based alternatives.

Background: The effects on word order of givenness have been observed in a number of languages, and can best be characterised by the *given-before-new* word order generalisation. While Hungarian is known for using word order to mark the Information Structural notions of topic and focus, word order effects of givenness have not been empirically investigated. The Hungarian clause can be divided into two distinct domains: pre-verbally, word order reflects a strict association with the categories of topic and focus, while post-verbally word order can be characterised as “free” (É. Kiss, 2002), making this domain ideal for testing the language’s sensitivity to givenness.

Methods: Three forced choice experiments, using 16 target sentences presented with context questions, were completed by a total of 361 participants. Each experiment tested word order preferences involving post-verbal constituents that were associated with three different types of givenness: (i) Exp1: simple textual givenness, with the given material having a textually identical antecedent in the context question (1), (ii) Exp2: textual givenness combined with topical givenness, with the given material marked as an aboutness topic in the context question (1), and (iii) Exp3: textual givenness combined with backgrounding, with the given material forming the background of a pre-verbal focus (2). Participants had to choose which of the following two word order possibilities fit better with the context question.

- (1) Topic Verb [XP_{given+(topical)} XP_{new}] ↔ Topic Verb [XP_{new} XP_{given+(topical)}]
- (2) Focus Verb [XP_{given+background} XP_{new}] ↔ Focus Verb [XP_{new} XP_{given+background}]

Results and Discussion The data were analysed using logistic mixed effects models. The analysis of the results did not reveal a significant effect of textual givenness on word order preferences (Exp1), whereas topical + textual (Exp2) and backgrounded + textual givenness (Exp3) both resulted in a preference for placing the given constituent before the contextually new material in the post-verbal domain. The results also made it clear that givenness associated word order variation is merely preferential, as opposed to the grammatical word order phenomena associated with topic and focus roles in the pre-verbal domain.



Givenness related word order phenomena may be explained by proposals which take a primarily syntactic approach, (eg. Frascarelli and Hinterhölzl (2007) or Kučerová (2012)). However, strictly syntactic approaches face problems when accounting for our data in two ways. They cannot account for the combined effect of topicality+givenness and backgroundedness+givenness in a uniform way, furthermore, they run into difficulties when considering the preferential nature of word order variations associated with these notions. An approach which assumes that these word order alternations are influenced by prosody (eg. Šimík and Wierzba (2015)), resolves these issues. The proposal argued for here assumes that simple textual givenness is not marked by deaccentuation in Hungarian, but given+topical and given+backgrounded elements, representing higher grades on a givenness scale/hierarchy (Ariel, 1990), are optionally deaccented. It also assumes that the clause final position is prosodically prominent in default sentence prosody, therefore deaccented material is dispreferred in this position. We conclude by comparing our analysis to Szendrői’s (2003) prosody-based account of Hungarian pre-verbal focus, suggesting possible ways to resolve the questions that this juxtaposition raises for the headedness of intonational phrases both in Hungarian and more generally.

References: Ariel, 1990. Accessing Noun-Phrase Antecedents. London: Routledge. É. Kiss, 2002. *The Syntax of Hungarian*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Frascarelli & Hinterhölzl, 2007. Types of topics in German and Italian. In Winkler & Schwabe (eds.), *On Information Structure, Meaning and Form*, 87–116. Kučerová, 2012. Grammatical marking of givenness. *Natural Language Semantics* 20(1). 1–30. Šimík & Wierzba, 2015. The role of givenness, presupposition, and prosody in Czech word order: An experimental study. *Semantics and pragmatics* 8. Szendrői, 2003. A stress-based approach to the syntax of Hungarian focus. *The Linguistic Review* 20(1).