

LÁSZLÓ KÁLMÁN  
WORD ORDER IN NON-NEUTRAL SENTENCES

0. *Introduction*

In this paper, I intend to give a non-systematic survey of Hungarian "corrective" sentences, i.e. utterances occurring mostly in retorts and answers.

Correctiveness is an important issue in Hungarian: first, the famous "freedom" of Hungarian word order (cf. É. Kiss (1981)) is most characteristically manifested in this type of sentence; second, some of the theoretically interesting phenomena (e.g. topicalization, focusing, different scope relations, sentence intertwining, etc.) are observable chiefly in corrective sentences. In what follows, I shall touch upon these problems only tangentially, in the measure required for understanding some semantic oppositions.

1. *Free Word Order?*

All the Hungarian authors who deal with what I call here corrective sentences agree that they manifest two characteristic features: (1) a very large number of constituent permutations is possible, and (2) distinguished syntactic positions (topic, focus, etc.) abound in them. The puzzle is, then, how "free word order" and the importance of positions can be brought together.

Now, Hungarian corrective sentences are typically a case where a rule system generating all the possible word order variations has no interest in itself (for a learner of the language, for example), unless it characterizes each and every variant in terms of usage and intonation, preferably in a systematic way. This amounts to saying that word order *is not free* in Hungarian corrective sentences (with some exceptions, of course) in the sense that we are usually not free to change the word order in any particular context.

Accordingly, the structure of the present section is as follows: first I will formulate some generalizations that do not hold in each and every instance, but are good guidelines to understand the situation. Then I will touch upon some restrictions and special cases.

### 1.1. *Contrastive and Emphatic Sentences*

The main characteristics of Hungarian corrective sentences is the presence of one or several "heavy stresses" which are not, in fact, necessarily "heavier" than normal stresses. What distinguishes them from normal stress is that, when followed by several (non-heavy-stressed) phonological words, these have to be unstressed. Consequently, a corrective sentence consisting of a single phonological word cannot be identified as such in itself. I shall help the reader to identify "heavy stress" by marking a double stress mark (").

If a corrective sentence contains one heavy stress only, that one is usually called the *focus stress*. The location of the focus stress is a main feature of corrective sentences. Namely, the following quasi-rules, or rather, suggestions, can be formulated:

- (1) Put the focus stress on the  $\bar{V}$  if you want an emphatic sentence.
- (2) Put the focus stress on an NP, Adv, or PP preceding the finite verb (or on the finite verb itself) if you want a contrastive sentence.

$\bar{V}$  in (1) is (since Ackerman and Komlósy (1984)) the name of a constituent lower than the VP but higher than the finite verb, e.g. prefixed verbs as *el-megy* 'away-go; leave', or "complex verbs" as *különbséget tesz* 'difference-ACC make; make a distinction'.

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Emphatic sentences presuppose that someone assumes, believes, has said, etc., the contrary of what we are saying:

- (1) "Elment a moziba.  
away-went the cinema-into  
'(s)he actually did go to the cinema.'

Contrastive sentences, on the other hand, suggest that the right assumption (statement, etc.) was made except for one argument, the one with the focus stress:

- (2) A "moziba ment el.  
the cinema-into went away  
'Actually, it is to the cinema that (s)he went.'

Notice that the "contrastive focus constituent", as is often called, has to precede the finite verb immediately, and the prefix (or anything that would be pre-verbal and stressed in the unmarked case) has to follow the finite verb in order for this requirement to be fulfilled.

For a huge class of verbs, if they are focus-stressed in a sentence, the sentence will be ambiguous:

- (3) "Megszerkesztette a könyvet.  
PREF-edited the book-acc  
'He DID edit the book.'  
'What (s)he actually did to the book was editing it'  
(rather than writing it, for example).

As a special case of contrastive sentences, mention should be made of multiple contrast, expressed by post-verbal heavy stress(es):

- (4) "Kati írt Péternek.  
Kati wrote Peter-dat  
'It is Kati who wrote to Peter' (i.e. not the other way round, or: it is not the case that somebody other than Kati wrote to somebody other than Peter).



## 1.2. Pre-Focus Positions

The constituent receiving pre-verbal heavy stress in the above sentences is often said to be in Focus position. On the other hand, as multiple-contrast sentences show, focus stress(es) may fall on other constituents as well. What is even more amazing, the pre-verbal focus-stress itself may fall on constituents other than the one in Focus position:

(5) "Mindig Péternek írt.

always Peter-dat wrote

'It was always Peter that (s)he wrote to.'

Although in (5) *Péternek* is the constituent in Focus, the focus stress falls on the quantifier *mindig*. The presupposed antecedent proposition is 'sometimes (s)he wrote to persons other than Peter'. With the verb in the Focus position, the sentence gets a different interpretation:

(6) "Mindig írt Péternek.

'(s)he always wrote to Peter.'

In this case, the presupposed (and corrected) proposition is 'sometimes (s)he did not write to Peter'. The focus-stressed position of *mindig* in (5)-(6) is called the Quantifier (Q) position.

The focus stress may "wander" still farther from the Focus position:<sup>1</sup>

(7) "Kati is mindig írt Péternek.

Kati also always wrote Peter-dat

'Kati, too, always wrote to Peter' (correcting 'only persons other than Kati wrote always to Peter').

(8) "Kati is mindig Péternek írt.

'For Kati, too, it was always Peter that she wrote to' (correcting 'for only persons other than Kati is it true that the person they wrote to was always Peter').

The position of "is-phrases" can be occupied by constituents of the form (*még*) X (*is*) 'even X'; (*már*) X (*is*)



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'already X'; *X is* 'also X'; (*még*) *X sem* 'not even X'; (*már*) *X sem* 'already X + negative verb'; *X sem* 'neither X'.

Sentences with their "is" and/or "quantifier" positions filled in are emphatic, i.e. they cannot be continued by a clause with 'instead of' or 'rather than'.

As can be expected from the above, free word order variations characterize the post-verbal and pre-focus-stress part only. Indeed, the same as in neutral sentences, the "topic" constituents before the focus stress and the post-verbal constituents are quasi-free in order. Unlike in neutral sentences, however, even the "topic" and post-verbal constituents are interchangeable to a certain extent; for instance, the grammatical subject can as easily be in post- than in pre-verbal position.

This freedom of word order may be in part due to the fact that all the constituents occurring in a free order in a corrective sentence are optional. The minimal (and most frequent) Hungarian corrective sentence contains a Focus constituent only:

- (9) (Nem,) "János.  
       no       John  
       '(No,) it is John who did/does/will do so.'
- (10) (De igen,) "írt.  
       but yes     wrote  
       '(S)he actually did write.'  
       'What (s)he actually did was writing.'

If the Q and/or the *is*-position is filled in, then the finite verb is obligatory. On the other hand, the "verbal modifier" (which is a convenient notion referring to any immediate constituent of the  $\bar{V}$  other than the finite verb itself) may "stand for" the whole  $\bar{V}$  in a minimal emphatic sentence:

- (11) (De igen,) "meg.  
       but yes     PREF  
       '(s)he actually did/does/will do so.'

2. *Subtleties*

2.1. *Topic: Neutral or Contrastive?*

Contrastive topic is again a phenomenon occurring in corrective sentences only. It is characterized by a "heavy stress" and rising intonation.

(12) "Kati "Péternek írt.

'As for Kati, it is Peter that she wrote to.'

(13) "Kati "írt Péternek.

'As for Kati, she actually did write to Peter.'

The function of contrastive topic is either to propose to change the topic of the conversation or to suggest that the proposition expressed by the post-topic part is only partially relevant; therefore, the addressee had better change the topic of the conversation again. (12) and (13), for instance, suggest to ask the speaker or somebody else whether other people than Kati did write to Peter, either suggesting that they most probably did or emphasizing the speaker's ignorance of the matter.

As can be seen from the above, the function of contrastive topic is not very clear-cut, at least for linguists identifying sentence meaning with logical form (cf. Szabolcsi (1981)); to be sure, it is clear-cut to native speakers of Hungarian. More interestingly, a gradual opposition seems to exist between contrastive and "neutral" topic: the more heavy (in the non-technical sense) the stress of a topic constituent and the more acutely rising its intonation, the more doubt is suggested as to the truth of the propositional part for other topics of the conversation. While most topics in corrective sentences could be interpreted as contrastive and thus interchangeability between the topic and the postverbal arguments would be impossible, they are not necessarily contrasted.

Mention has to be made of a copy phenomenon in corrective sentences containing contrastive topic: an NP in

the Focus position or a  $\bar{V}$  can be copied to the contrastive topic, in dative or infinitive form, respectively:

- (14) "Jánosnak "mindig János ment el.  
 John-dat always John went away  
 'As for John, it was always he who went away.'
- (15) "Elmenni "mindig János ment el.  
 away-go-INF always John went away  
 'As for going away, it was always John who did so.'

### 2.2. "Precedential" Sentences

As was said above, the  $\bar{V}$  bears a heavy stress in emphatic sentences. However, if the verbal modifier is lexical (as in (16)), this type of sentences is ambiguous:<sup>2</sup>

- (16) "Őrültnek tartotta Jánost.  
 mad-dat considered John-acc  
 '(S)he actually did consider John mad.'  
 '(S)he considered John mad' (rather than shy, for instance).
- (17) "Megittam a vizet.  
 PREF-drank-I the water-acc  
 'I actually did drink the water.'

Moreover, there is a class of  $\bar{V}$  that can be only contrastive when bearing a focus stress:

- (18) "Vizet ivott János.  
 water-acc drank John  
 'What John drank was actually water.'

In these cases the emphatic reading can be obtained by inverting the  $\bar{V}$ :

- (19) "Ivott vizet János.  
 'John DID drink water.'



Now, most positive emphatic sentences are ambiguous in the sense that the presupposed negative ones that they correct are also ambiguous:

- (20) 'Nem ivott 'vizet.  
       not drank water-acc  
 (a) '(S)he did not drink water at that specific reference time.'  
 (b) '(S)he has never drunk water.'
- (21) De (igen,) "ivott vizet.  
       but yes       drank water-acc  
 '(S)he actually did drink water.'  
 'There has actually been an occasion when (s)he drank water.'

This subtle distinction becomes relevant when the sentence contains  $\bar{V}$ s like those of (16) or (17). If the focus-stressed  $\bar{V}$  is either ambiguous (contrastive or emphatic, as in (16)) or unambiguously emphatic (as in (17)), then the inverted  $\bar{V}$  has only the "precedential" reading (illustrated by (21)) when focussed:

- (22) "Tartotta (már) örültnek Jánost.  
       already  
 'There has actually been some occasion when (s)he considered John mad.'
- (23) "Ittam (már) meg a vizet melegen.  
       warm  
 'There has actually been some occasion when I drank warm water.'

### 2.3. "Quantifier Scope"

A recurring topic of the investigation of Hungarian corrective sentences is the order and scoping of quantifiers. Two empirical facts are involved in this topic: first, a

universal quantifier may appear in both pre- and post-verbal position; second, "existential expressions" may occur both in topic and in post-verbal positions, potentially with different interpretations.

The first problem can be summarized as follows. Universal quantifiers may either occupy the quantifier position (7) or be unstressed after the finite verb (24a) on the one hand, or, on the other, they may be *stressed* after the finite verb (24b); some claim that these two types of corrective sentence are in free variation:

(7) "Kati is mindig írt Péternek.

(24a) "Kati is írt Péternek mindig.

(24b) "Kati is írt Péternek "mindig.

The only difference is in fact that while (7) and (24a) correct 'only persons other than Kati wrote always to Peter', (24b) corrects 'only persons other than Kati wrote to Peter', i.e. *always* is new information in (24b). Consequently, the generalization can be made that multiple heavy stress corresponds to several constituents expressing new information; contrasted constituents are only one particular instance of new information. Consider:

(25) -- Péter írt? / -- Péter írt Jánosnak?

'Did Peter write?' 'Did Peter write to János?'

-- Nem, "Kati írt "Péternek.

'No, it was Kati who wrote to Peter.'

This illustrates that the second heavy stress may express either multiple contrast or just additional new information.

In a corrective sentence, the unstressed post-focus part refers to the presupposed proposition to be corrected. This is the reason why it is optional: the corrected proposition is often obvious from the history of the discourse. When corrective sentences are used in a non-corrective way (e.g. this characterizes the language of the radio and the



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press in Hungary), where the "corrected" proposition has to be established by accomodation, the unstressed part is never optional. Accordingly, a universal quantifier appears in post-verbal unstressed position if and only if it is part of the presupposed antecedent.

The case of existential quantifiers is less clear. Their unmarked position is clearly post-verbal:

(26) Az "ablakot törte be valaki.  
the window-acc broke in somebody  
'It is the window that somebody broke.'

(27) "Mindenki szeret valakit.  
everybody loves somebody-acc  
'Everybody loves somebody.'

When in topic position, its meaning is sometimes claimed to be different:

(28) "Valaki az "ablakot törte be.

(29) "Valakit "mindenki szeret.

(28) only occurs as a member of a series of multiple-contrast sentences ("... and somebody else broke the doors"); it corresponds, then, to (24b). Since existentially quantified expressions cannot be focused, they are suspect of being incapable of carrying new information. Observe that stressed existential expressions cannot occur post-verbally either:

(30) \*Az "ablakot törte be "valaki.

(29) is roughly the paraphrase of (27), with an additional hint to the deficiency of the proposition (e.g. "... but nobody loves the right person").

The fact that *somebody* may refer to a specific person in (28)-(29) -- which also means uniqueness instead of distributive meaning in (29) -- is not surprising given the ambiguity of this word in many languages. The usual claim, however, that the same word in (26)-(27) does not have this feature, is not true.





Other restrictions exist, of course, e.g. filling in the Q-position by a negative quantifier such as *soha* 'never', *senki sem* 'nobody' or *semmi sem* 'nothing' excludes the presence of both an *is*-constituent and a negative particle. More detailed information on this can be found in Kenesei (1985) and Prószéky (1985).

As for the syntactic structures of corrective sentences, the constant nature of the pre-verbal positions led É. Kiss (1981) to derive possible sentences by postulating an "invariant structure" where the finite verb is initial, as well as rules such as "topicalization" and "focusing", which move the appropriate post-verbal constituent to the correct pre-verbal positions. The problems of this analysis are discussed in Kenesei (forthcoming), for example.

I know of one other proposal, namely Barabás *et al.* (1985), where it is suggested that all the constituents should be generated *in situ*, according to templates like (32) above. In their opinion, the relationship of these templates to phrase markers (not expressing linear order) is to be established by general, but language specific, statements ("mapping rules"). The generalizations concerning Hungarian can be expressed, in their opinion, by both templates and mapping rules rather than by phrase-structure rules (and movement rules). Their argument for this treatment is that it would allow a unified treatment of neutral and non-neutral sentences.

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### NOTES

1. Note that all of the elements that precede the Focus and can be individually stressed can also be simultaneously stressed.
2. Although (17) is as ambiguous as (3), the idea put forth here is that the verbal modifier itself cannot be contrasted.
3. (32) is reproduced from Kenesei (forthcoming) with slight modifications.

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Institute of Linguistics,  
Hungarian Academy of Sciences,  
Budapest