

The inverse-scope puzzle of contrastive topics in Hungarian, which does not exist at all

Judit Farkas and Gábor Alberti (U. Pécs)

In Hungarian, the scope order of preverbal (non-*in-situ*) constituents corresponds to their surface order (1a-b); as is shown by the proposed paraphrase of (1c), however, quantifiers in contrastive topic position (in (Spec,C_{Top}P)) give the impression of having inverse scope, apparently violating this generalization (É. Kiss 2002: 25).

- (1) a. [_{FocP} Kevés diák látott [_{QP} minden filmet [_{AspP} látott ...]]].
few student saw each film.Acc
 ‘It holds for few students that they saw every film.’
- b. [_{QP} Minden filmet [_{FocP} kevés diák látott [_{AspP} ...]]].
each film.Acc few student saw
 ‘In the case of each of the films, it holds for few students that they saw it.’
- c. [_{C_{Top}P} ^[Minden filmet látott] [_{FocP} kevés diák [_{QP} minden filmet látott] ... látott]].
each film.Acc saw few student each film.Acc saw
 ‘^Every film was seen by few students.’ (meaning: cca. (1a))
 that is, cca. ‘It holds for few students that they saw every film.’

The solution to the “scope inversion” puzzle in Hungarian proposed by Gyuris (2009: 150) rests upon this, *unexplained*, observation: “only those Hungarian sentences containing a contrastive topic are well-formed that have well-formed counterparts with the contrastive topic expression in postverbal position.” Our explanation can be based upon the extraction of a right branching constituent in the same way as in the case of the complex-event denoting nominal expression *both colleagues’ sending away* in (2): it is assumed for semantic reasons that the remnant of this entire expression is hosted in (Spec,C_{Top}P) but only the phonetic material of **the possessor** appears preverbally, after extracting **its right branching complement** (Alberti 2004).

- (2) [_{?P} [_{?NounP} Mindkét kollégának [_{DP} az elküldését]] ellenzem [_{?P} az elküldését]]!
both colleague.Dat the away.send.Nmn.Poss.3Sg.Acc oppose.DefObj.1Sg ...

InSc reading: ‘As for the option according to which both colleagues would be sent away, I am definitely against that [but there are options that I am not against, e.g., as for me, one of them can be sent away].’

ExSc reading: ‘It holds for both colleagues that I am against the option according to which the given colleague would be sent away [neither of them should be sent away].’

The crucial part of this approach is based on the following argumentation. If a quantifier belongs to the head of a deverbal nominal construction as its argument, ambiguity may emerge due to a potential (“external-scope”) reading according to which the quantifier is understood as belonging to the finite/matrix verb (2.ExSc), in addition to the primary (“internal-scope”) reading (2.InSc). The possibility of ExSc interpretation can be attributed to a universal rule concerning the percolation of arbitrary operator features that Horvath (1997:548) bases her theory on *wh*-feature percolation in certain Hungarian interrogative subordinate constructions (Horvath 1997:547–557). Kenesei applies essentially the same universal rule (Kenesei 1998:223–225) to certain focus constructions in Hungarian. We thus apply the rule to (some kind of) universal quantifier feature, an *each*-feature. A determining

component of the rule is that the original position of the percolating feature ceases to constitute an operator of the given kind (Horvath 1997:549–550). As for formal details, while the quantifier determiner prefix *mind-* ‘each’ is morphologically attached to an element in the depth of a noun phrase, the pragmasemantic contribution of the *each*-feature counts as if it were attached to the noun head of the given noun phrase.

Thus, in (2.ExSc) the object of the matrix verb counts as the quantifier of the matrix verb in the clause-level information structure, while in (2.InSc) the phonetically marked contrastive topic position of the same object makes it unambiguous that the quantifier status belongs to the possessor within the complex internal structure of the given object. As for the internal information-structural function of the possessor in (2.ExSc), it ceases to constitute a quantifier within its matrix noun phrase due to the feature percolation but, as it remains foregrounded within the deverbal nominal construction, it should be considered to be a (non-contrastive) topic of the nominal head. It is also worth noting that, though the complex noun phrase occupies its operator position on the left periphery of the sentence as a remnant, having thrown off its right-branching periphery, the corresponding interpretations are the same as if the possessive construction were intact.

Hence, no pragmasemantic contribution comes from remnant formation. Although, relative to the variant in (1a), the one with a contrastive topic on the left periphery in (1c) seems to have an inverse-scope taking quantifier, what takes scope over the focus is not the accusative case-marked argument of the verb but the remnant of the phonetic form of the proposition describing the option that ‘every film was seen by x, where x is a student’. At this point, however, there emerges a question. Does contrastively topicalizing a proposition supply no pragmasemantic contribution? As can be seen below, different translations can be associated with the variants (1a,c)—but, what is crucial, with a coinciding $F > Q$ scope hierarchy between the subject and the accusative case-marked argument of the verb. Anyway, the two readings practically coincide: what is explicitly *indicated* in (1c) by the contrastive topicalization can be regarded as an implication in the Gyuris-style “well-formed counterpart” in (1a), since a wide-scope taking focus over a proposition P indicates or implies that alternatives of P hold for the elements of the complement subset of the relevant set in the background of the focus. Hence, the option expressed by P can safely be claimed to have alternatives in (1a), too.

Alberti 2004. “Climbing for Aspect...”. In *Verb Clusters...* Amsterdam: Benjamins. 253–289.

É. Kiss 2002. *The Syntax of Hungarian*. CUP.

Gyuris 2009. *The Semantics and Pragmatics of the Contrastive Topic...* Budapest: Lexica.

Horvath 1997. “The status of ‘wh-expletives’..” *NLLTh* 15: 509-572.

Kenesei 1998. “Argumentumszerkezet és VP-fókusz.” In *A mai magyar nyelv...* Szeged.