

Grammaticalized backgrounding

Katalin É Kiss

I Goal

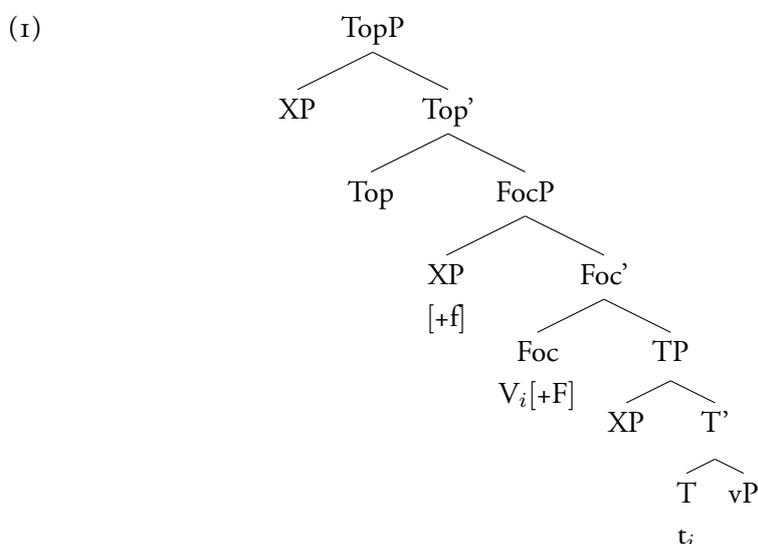
In Hungarian, focus movement, i.e., the projection of a focus-background structure on top of the verbal projection, is very common. It is much more frequent than it was in Old Hungarian (cf. É. Kiss 2011), and it is in the better-known European languages with a focus position in their C-domain.¹ This paper discusses three sentence types in which focus movement is either obligatory or is the preferred option, yielding an unmarked, information-structurally neutral sentence. The paper examines which pragmatic, semantic, lexical and/or syntactic factors conspire in each case to necessitate the building of the focus-background structure. It will show that the [+presupposed] feature of the background often plays a more decisive role in eliciting the focus-background articulation than the [+exhaustive] feature of the focus. These data lead to the conclusion that the syntactic analysis of focusing as the creation of a secondary, specificational predication structure on top of the verbal projection has a greater explanatory force than the standard analysis which motivates focus movement by the need of checking a [+focus] or [+exhaustive] feature.

Section 2 briefly juxtaposes the feature checking and the predication approaches to structural focus. Section 3 examines the focus-background articulation attested in answers to quiz questions and in titles of newspaper articles. Section 4 recalls the case of verbs of coming into being and verbs of creation requiring a focused adjunct. Section 5 attempts to clarify why certain nominal predicates need to be focused in the unmarked case. Section 6 is a conclusion.

¹Nagy (2010) selected 50 sentences containing a structural focus in a Hungarian novel, and compared them with their equivalents in the English translation of the novel. She found that of the 50 English sentences translated from Hungarian only 5 contained a structural (cleft or pseudo-cleft) focus. She also selected 50 sentences containing a structural focus in the Hungarian translation of an English novel. In this case, the proportion of sentences with a structural focus in English was even smaller: among the 50 sentences there was one *it*-cleft and there were two pseudo-clefts.

2 Alternative derivations of the focus-background structure

In the standard approaches to structural focus, focus movement is motivated by the need of feature checking. According to Bródy (1995), focus constituents have a [+f] feature, and the Focus Criterion, akin to the WH-Criterion, requires that the specifier of a [+F] XP contain a [+f] phrase, and at LF, all [+f] phrases be in the specifier of a [+F] XP. The [+F] feature is a feature of the tensed V, which moves to Foc in order to check [+F] in a specifier-head configuration. This is a possible realization of Bródy's proposal (cf. É. Kiss 2008a):



A FocP projection in the C domain of clause structure is a site of feature checking in the universal sentence model of Rizzi (1997), as well. The content of [+F] apparently varies to some extent across languages, but it also has an invariant kernel. In the formulation of Krifka (2008):

- (2) A property F of an expression α is a Focus property iff F signals
- a. that alternatives of (parts of) the expression α or
 - b. alternatives of the denotation of (parts of) α are relevant for the interpretation of α .

As shown by Molnár (2006), [+F] can also involve the feature [+contrast]. In Hungarian, and presumably in other languages with structural focus, as well, the content of the focus feature also includes the component [+exhaustive] (cf. Szabolcsi 1981, 1994, Kenesei 1986, É. Kiss 1998 etc.) Thus in Hungarian, the movement

of a constituent into focus position signals that of the alternatives for which the predicate can hold, that named by the focus-moved constituent is the only one for which the predicate actually holds. Horvath (2005, 2007) proposed to separate the feature [+F] from the feature [+exhaustive]. What elicits focus movement in her theory is an Exhaustive Identification head, whose [+exhaustive] feature needs to be checked by a constituent supplied with an Exhaustive Identification Operator. The relation between exhaustivity and focus is indirect; the Exhaustive Identification Operator, similar to *even* and *only*, requires association with focus.

The feature-checking approach to structural focus raises both theoretical and empirical questions. As argued by Fanselow (2006), the assumption of the feature [+focus] would violate the Inclusiveness Condition, as it is not part of the feature composition of lexical items. Horvath's Exhaustive Identification Operator, an independent constituent in the array of lexical items from which the sentence is constructed, circumvents this problem, however, it has been criticized for empirical reasons. É. Kiss (2008b), for example, enlists cases like that in (3) where the [+exhaustive] feature is redundant or irrelevant, hence is unlikely to enforce the projection of an additional syntactic layer.

- (3) [TopP András_i [FocP DECEMBER_i 13-ÁN_j született_k [TP *t_j* *t_k* [vP *t_i* *t_k* *t_j*]]]]
 Andrew December 13th-on was.born

‘Andrew was born on the 13th of December.’

Furthermore, the approach cannot account for the distributional constraints on the exhaustive identification operator, which cannot combine with a universal quantifier (4), but can license an otherwise illicit bare nominal argument (5).

- (4) * [FocP MINDEN FIÚ_i bukott_j [TP meg *t_j* [vP *t_i* *t_j*]]]
 every boy failed PRT

‘It was every boy who failed.’

- (5) [FocP JÓ TANULÓ_i bukott_j [TP meg *t_j* [vP *t_i* *t_j*]]]
 good student failed PRT

‘It was a good student who failed.’

The alternative approach to structural focus adopted in this paper interprets the focus-background construction as a predication structure, and motivates focus movement by the need of establishing a syntactic predication relation. This approach goes back to Higgins's (1973) analysis of the English pseudo-cleft construction, and

is represented, among others, by den Dikken's (2005) analysis of English cleft sentences, Huber's (2000) analysis of the Swedish and German cleft construction, and É. Kiss's (2006a, 2008b) and Surányi's (2010) analysis of Hungarian sentences with a structural focus. In this approach, the focus bears a syntactic predication relation to the background representing its subject, and undergoes focus movement in order to satisfy the c-command condition of predication. (As den Dikken (2006) argues, the c-command condition of predication is satisfied not only when the subject c-commands the predicate but also when the predicate c-commands the subject.) The properties of the background and the focus can be derived from the specificational predication relation between them. In a predication relation, the existence of the subject of predication is established independently of the given proposition, i.e., the subject is associated with an existential presupposition (see Kuroda (1972) on categorical judgments). In the case of specificational predication, the subject determines a set presupposed to exist - whence its [+presupposed] feature. The function of a specificational predicate is to specify, i.e., to exhaustively identify, the referents making up the set - whence its [+exhaustive] feature. The ban on focused universal quantifiers has been derived from a ban on universals functioning as nominal predicates (É. Kiss 2008b). The licensing of bare nominal arguments in focus position is due to their predicative role.

The present paper provides further arguments for the predication analysis of Hungarian focus constructions. It examines three sentence types in which focusing is obligatory or preferable, nevertheless the [+exhaustive] feature of the focus constituent is semantically-pragmatically irrelevant or redundant, hence is unlikely to be the trigger of focusing. In these cases, the [+presupposed] feature of the background plays a more important role in motivating focus movement. What these constructions have in common is that they predicate the identity of a variable determined by the background with a referent. The identity predication may play various purposes: to present the background as known, presupposed information; to highlight the focus by associating everything else in the sentence with the feature [+presupposed]; to cancel the non-specificity requirement on the internal argument of verbs of coming into being and verbs of creation by backgrounding the internal argument; or to distinguish properties which an individual may or may not have from properties which an individual is presupposed to have, and merely the value of the property needs to be identified.

3 Obligatory focus-background articulation in answers to quiz questions

Questions like those in (6a), (7a), (8a), and (9a), typically asked of participants in a quiz, or students in a classroom, must be answered by a focus construction in Hungarian.

- (6) a. Mit tudsz Rubik Ernőről?
 what-ACC know-you Ernő Rubik-about
 ‘What do you know about Ernő Rubik?’
- b. [_{FocP} RUBIK ERNŐ /Ő_i találta; [_{TP} fel *t_j* [_{vP} *t_i* *t_j* a
 Ernő Rubik /he invented PRT the
 Rubik-kockát]]]
 Rubik-cube
 ‘It was Erno Rubik/it was him who invented the Rubic-cube.’
- (7) a. Ki az a Tenzing Norgay?
 who that the Tenzing Norgay
 ‘Who is Tenzing Norgay?’
- b. [_{FocP} TENZING NORGAYJAL /VELE mászta_j [_{TP} meg *t_j* [_{vP}
 Tenzing Norgay-with /he-with climbed PRT
 Sir Edmund Hilary *t_j* 1953-ban a Mount Everestet]]]
 Sir Edmund Hilary 1953-in the Mount Everest
 ‘It was with Tenzing Norgay/it was with him that Sir Edmund Hilary
 climbed Mount Everest in 1953.’
- (8) a. Mi történt 1776. július 4-én?
 what happened 1776 July 4th-on
 ‘What happened on July 4th, 1776?’
- b. [_{FocP} 1776. JÚLIUS 4-ÉN /AKKOR kiáltották_j [_{TP} ki *t_j* [_{vP}
 1776 July 4th-on /then declared-they PRT
 pro *t_j* az Amerikai Egyesült államok függetlenségét]]]
 the American United States’ independence
 ‘It was on July 4th, 1997/it was then that the independence of the
 United States of America was declared.’
- (9) a. Miről híres Szent Ilona szigete?
 what-about famous Saint Helen island-3SG
 ‘What is Saint Helenís Island famous for?’

- b. [_{FocP} SZENT ILONA SZIGETÉN /OTT [_{TP} élt_j t_j [_{vP} Napóleon
Saint Helen's island-on /there lived Napoleon
t_j száműzetésben]]]
exile-in
'It was on Saint Helen's Island/it was there that Napoleon lived in
exile.'

In the answers to such questions the only contextually given element of the answer must be construed as the focus, and the contextually new elements must be construed as the background – in contrast to pragmatic theories identifying the focus with new information and the background with given information. Other formulations of these sentences, e.g, variants with the given element in topic position, would be infelicitous as answers to the given questions:

- (10) a. Mit tudsz Rubik Ernőről?
'What do you know about Erno Rubik?'
b. % [_{TopP} Rubik Ernő [_{TP} fel-találta a Rubik-kockát]]
Ernő Rubik PRT-invented the Rubik-cube
'Ernő Rubik invented the Rubik-cube.'
- (11) a. Ki az a Tenzing Norgay?
'Who is Tenzing Norgay?'
b. % [_{TopP} Vele [_{TP} meg-mászta Sir Edmund Hilary a Mount
he.with PRT-climbed Sir Edmund Hilary the Mount
Everestet]]
Everest
'With him, Sir Edmund Hilary climbed Mount Everest.'
- (12) a. Mi történt 1776. július 4-én?
'What happened on July 4th, 1776?'
b. % [_{TopP} 1776. július 4-én [_{TP} ki-kiáltották az Amerikai
1776 July 4th-on PRT-declared-they the American
Egyesült államok függetlenségét]]
United States independence
'On July 4th, 1776 the independence of the United States of America
was declared.'
- (13) a. Mirol híres Szent Ilona szigete?
'What is Saint Helen's Island famous for?'
b. % [_{TopP} Ott [_{TP} száműzetésben élt Napóleon]]
there exile-in lived Napoleon

‘There Napoleon lived in exile.’

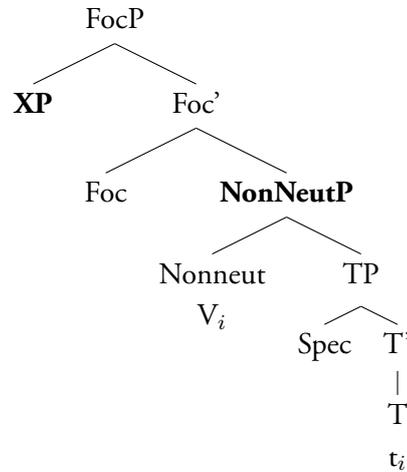
The focus in each of the answers in (6)–(9) has the feature [+exhaustive], but it seems redundant (e.g., the person inventing the Rubik-cube necessarily exhausts the set of those inventing the Rubik-cube), hence it is unlikely to be the trigger of focusing. What these sentences express is (exhaustive) identification; they identify the focus referent as the actor, co-actor, date, or location, respectively, of a famous, generally known event. Although the non-focused sentence part, the background, is contextually new, it presents the information it contains as something that is expected to be known. This is attained by focusing the name, date, or location to be identified, whereby the background assumes a [+presupposed] feature.

This type of information structure has also been observed in English cleft sentences by Prince (1978). As she put it, the function of clefts of this type is to mark a piece of information as fact known to some people although not yet known to the intended hearer. Thus they are frequent in historical narrative, or wherever the speaker wishes to indicate that s/he does not wish to take personal responsibility for the truth or originality of the statement being made (Prince 1978:899-900).

Prince calls this function of clefting a ‘subordinating’ function. In English, subordinate information is expressed syntactically in the form of a subordinate clause. In several languages, among them in Hausa and other Chadic languages (cf. Jaggar 2001, Hartmann & Zimmermann 2007), and in Sumer (Zólyomi 2011) focus constructions, though monoclausal, still preserve traces of their biclausal origin, with the copula and/or a relativizer reinterpreted as a focus marker. Hungarian focus constructions are monoclausal, but focus movement creates a structure in which the background is *c*-commanded by - hence subordinated to - the focused XP. In an updated version of (1) (cf. Horvath 2005, Olsvay 2000), the tensed verb attracted by the focus in Spec,FocP lands in the head of a maximal projection subsumed by FocP, i.e., the *c*-command relation between the focus (XP) and the background (NonNeutP) holds between two maximal projections:²

²The topic is also represented in the background by its vP-internal copy.

(14)



Quiz and classroom situations, where the quiz-master or teacher asks the participant/student to identify a given referent with a description determining a generally known actor, date, location etc., are perfect examples of the type of situation described by Prince (1978) to elicit information subordination. Her theory, in fact, predicts that the information intended to be presented by the quiz-master/teacher as generally known is to be backgrounded syntactically, as well.

The focus-background articulation, obligatorily imposed on answers to quiz questions by pragmatics in Hungarian, is also very common in titles of newspaper articles. Observe some examples from the August 13, 2011 issue of *Index*, a Hungarian online newspaper. (In these cases, the cleft construction does not appear to be the appropriate English equivalent; the Hungarian structural focus is translated with an English prosodic focus.)

- (15) a. [_{FocP} HELYI FIDESZESEKET_i jelentett_j [_{TP} fel _{t_j} [_{vP} az
local FIDESZ-members-ACC prosecuted PRT the
ajkai polgármester _{t_j} _{t_i}]]]
Ajka mayor-NOM
'The mayor of Ajka has prosecuted LOCAL FIDESZ PARTY MEMBERS'
- b. SZÁZMILLIÓKAT fizet egy jó tanácsért a KIM
hundredmillions-ACC pays a good advice-for the KIM
'KIM [the Ministry for Administration and Justice] pays HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS for good advice'
- c. ÚJABB BÜNTETŐÜGYBEN hallgatták ki Galambos
further criminal-case-in interrogated-they PRT Lajos
Lajost
Galambos

‘Lajos Galambos has been interrogated IN A FURTHER CRIMINAL CASE’

- d. KÜLÖNBIZOTTSÁG vizsgálja a norvég mészárlást
special.committee investigates the Norwegian massacre
‘The Norwegian massacre is being investigated BY A SPECIAL COMMITTEE’
- e. EGYENRUHÁBAN menne a bíróságra a norvég
uniform-in go-COND.3SG the court-to the Norwegian
mészáros
butcher
‘The Norwegian butcher would go to court IN UNIFORM’
- f. A SZÉLSŐJOBB VESZÉLYEIRE figyelmeztet a norvég
the far-right’s danger-to warns the Norwegian
tömeggyilkosság
mass-murder
‘The Norwegian mass murder warns OF THE DANGERS OF THE EXTREME RIGHT’
- g. TÍZBŐL KILENC VÁLLALKOZÁST érintenek a
ten-from nine enterprise-ACC affect the
hekkertámadások
hacker-attacks
‘Attacks by hackers affect NINE OUT OF TEN ENTERPRISES’
- h. FOTÓK szivárogtak ki a következő Androidról
photos leaked out the next Android-about
‘PHOTOS have leaked about the next Android’
- i. BLACKBERRYN szerveződnék a londoni zavargások
Blackberry-on organize-REFL-3PL the London riots
‘The London riots are being organized ON BLACKBERRY’
- j. LÁBNYOMÁVAL EGYÜTT kövült meg a szarvas
foot-print-his-with together petrified PRT the horny
dinoszaurusz
dinosaur
‘The horny dinosaur was petrified TOGETHER WITH ITS FOOT-PRINT’
- k. EMMY-DÍJAT kap az 1200 bűnözőt rács mögé
Emmy-award-ACC receives the 1200 criminal-ACC bar behind
juttató műsor vezetője
getting program’s leader

‘The anchorman of the program getting 1200 criminals behind bars
is awarded AN EMMY PRIZE’

1. [_{TopP} Lázár Vilmos [_{LocP} TÖRÖTT BORDÁKKAL készül
Vilmos Lázár broken ribs-with prepares
a kettes fogathajtó -vb-re
the tandem- carriage-driving world-championship-for
‘Vilmos Lázár is preparing for the tandem carriage driving world
championship WITH BROKEN RIBS’

The function of the focus-background articulation in these titles is similar to that attested in answers to quiz questions: to subordinate part of the sentence despite the fact that it conveys contextually new information. The motivation for subordination is somewhat different though: its purpose is to highlight the focus, to attract readers’ attention by emphasizing the most unexpected, most striking element of an event. This is attained by relegating the rest of the title, representing expected, inferable elements of the event or situation, into the background.

In some of the titles in (15), the backgrounded information is common knowledge. In the case of (15a), for example, it is common knowledge that Ministries, among them the Ministry of Administration and Justice, pay to advisors. In other examples, the background is familiar to people who followed the news on the preceding days. (15i), for example, assumes it to be known that there is rioting in London. The background is sometimes merely inferable, or accomodatable. E.g., those reading (15h) can easily infer that another Android is about to come out, or those reading (15l) can easily realize that there is soon another tandem carriage driving world championship, and the Hungarian champion, Vilmos Lázár, is preparing to participate.

Summarizing this section: in answers to quiz questions asking the addressee to identify a referent with the description of a generally known person, object, date, location, etc., the description is represented as common knowledge by being subordinated in information structure. This is attained by the projection of a syntactic focus-background structure, where the subordinated information is relegated to the background (NonNeutP) c-commanded by the focus. Sentences figuring as titles of newspaper articles also often subordinate inferable, accomodatable information by establishing a focus-background structure – in order to highlight the most striking element of the news.

4 Predicates of coming into being and creation taking obligatory focused adjuncts

As Szabolcsi (1986) argued, and a series of studies (É. Kiss 1995, Kálmán 1995, Bende-Farkas 1995, 2002, PiÕón 2006a, 2006b, Peredy 2009) confirmed, the set of existential predicates requiring a non-specific indefinite subject is much larger than is visible in English. Verbs of appearance, coming into being, and creation, whose meaning contains an EXIST component, all require their internal argument to be non-specific. Since these verbs assert the coming into being of their theme, its existence cannot be presupposed - that is why it cannot be represented by a definite or specific indefinite noun phrase. Cf.

- (16) a. Vendégek érkeztek.
 guests arrived
 b. *A vendégek érkeztek.
 the guests arrived
- (17) a. Gyerek született.
 baby was.born
 'A baby was born.'
 b. *Minden gyerek született.
 every child was.born
- (18) a. Vendégeket hívtunk
 guests-ACC invited-we
 'We invited guests.'
 b. *A vendégeket hívtuk.
 the guests-ACC invited-we

Since topicalization can only target a constituent whose existence is independent of the event described in the sentence, the non-specific internal argument of these verbs cannot be externalized/topicalized, i.e., it cannot figure as the subject in a predication structure.

The non-specificity requirement does not apply to the internal argument of the telicized counterparts of these verb, supplied with a resultative verbal particle:

- (19) a. A vendégek MEG érkeztek.
 the guests PRT arrived
 'The guests have arrived.'

- b. A vendégeket MEG hívtuk.
 the guests-ACC PRT invited-we
 ‘We have invited the guests.’

These particle verbs, however, are different lexical items; they are not verbs of coming into being or creation; they denote the change-of-state of a preexisting referent.

The non-specificity requirement on the internal argument can also be circumvented in the case of the particleless verbs in (16)–(18) – by focusing an element other than the internal argument, whereby the internal argument becomes part of the background associated with an existential presupposition.

- (20) a. A vendégek TEGNAP érkeztek.
 the guests yesterday arrived
 ‘The guests arrived YESTERDAY.’
- b. A vendégek KOCSIVAL érkeztek.
 the guests car-with arrived
 ‘The guests arrived BY CAR.’
- c. A vendégek MOSZKVÁBÓL érkeztek.
 the guests Moscow-from arrived
 ‘The guests arrived FROM MOSCOW.’
- d. Minden gyerek IDŐRE született.
 every child on.time was.born
 ‘Every child was born ON TIME.’
- e. A vendégeket MA ESTÉRE hívtuk.
 the guests-ACC this evening-for invited-we
 ‘We invited the guests FOR TONIGHT.’
- (21) A vendégeket MI hívtuk.
 the guests-ACC we invited
 ‘The guests were invited by US.’
- (22) A vendégeket HIVTUK, nem maguktól jöttek.
 the guests-ACC invited-we not themselves-by came
 ‘We INVITED the guests, they did not come spontaneously.’

(20a)–(20e) contain a focused adjunct.³ In (21), the focus position is filled by the agent-subject of the transitive verb. In (22) the verb of creation itself has been

³Some approaches (e.g. É. Kiss 1995, 2006a, Surányi 2009) also treat the constructions in (19), involving particle verbs, on a par with (20a)–(20e); they argue that the preverbal particle is an alternative filler of the structural focus position. For a detailed analysis of the relation of the focus and the verbal particle, see É. Kiss (2006b).

focused. The foci occupying Spec,FP, i.e., those in (20)–(21), all have the feature [+exhaustive] (thus (20e) could not be used in a situation in which we invited the guests for more than one occasion). Nevertheless, these sentences are unmarked from the point of view of information structure; they require no special context, they evoke no contrast, no alternatives. Focusing serves no other purpose than associating the background with the feature [+presupposed], which licences a [+specific], topicalizable internal argument.

In sum: verbs with an EXIST component, i.e., verbs of coming into being and creation, can have a [+specific] internal argument only if the sentence contains a focus. The focus can be represented by the verb, or, in the case of transitive verbs, by the grammatical subject, but most typically it is represented by an adjunct. Focus movement results in a subordinated background, where the non-focused section of the sentence, including the internal argument, assumes a [+presupposed] feature, and the non-specificity requirement on the latter is deleted.

5 Nominal predicates valuing presupposed variable properties

An apparently mysterious fact of Hungarian sentences involving a nominal predicate is that the predicate is sometimes to be construed as a verb modifier (akin to the verbal particle of resultative sentences), occupying the specifier of the highest verbal projection (identified as AspP/PredP/TP in various analyses), and is sometimes to be construed as a focus, occupying the specifier of a FocP projection subsuming AspP/PredP/TP. Since the focus attracts the copula, the nominal predicate will be immediately preverbal in both cases. The difference of the two structures becomes obvious under negation. A predicate-negating negative particle attracts the verb, hence it inverts the order of the nominal predicate and the copula. If, however, it negates the focus, the order of the focus and the copula remains invariant. In the examples below, predicate nominals in Spec,TP will be spelled in boldface, and those in Spec,FocP will be spelled in capitals.

(23) Predicate negation:

- a. Boldog vagy?
happy are-you
'Are you happy?'
- b. [_{NegP} Nem vagyok_i [_{TP} **boldog** *t_i*]]
not am-I happy
'I am not happy.'

- (24) Focus negation:
- a. Angol vagy?
English are-you
'Are you English?'
- b. [NegP Nem [FocP ANGOL_j vagyok_i [TP *t_j* *t_i*]]
not English am-I
'I am not ENGLISH. [It is not English that I am.]'

Both (23b) and (24b) represent unmarked sentences with no special discourse value. (24b) could also be formulated without focusing the predicate, albeit the focused version seems more common to me. (23b), on the other hand, would be highly marked with a focused predicate; it would only be acceptable in the case of an explicit contrast. Cf.

- (25) a. Boldog vagy?
happy are-you
'Are you happy?'
- b. % [NegP Nem [FocP BOLDOG_j vagyok_i [TP *t_j* *t_i*]]
not happy am-I
'I am not HAPPY. [It is not happy that I am.]'
- c. Nem BOLDOG vagyok, hanem VIDÁM.
not happy am-I but cheerful
'It is not happy that I am but cheerful.'
- (26) a. Angol vagy?
English are-you
trans 'Are you English?'
- b. [NegP Nem vagyok_i [TP **angol** *t_i*]]
not am-I English
'I am not English.'

The difference between the two sentences is unlikely to be lexical. One and the same lexical item is to be used in one or the other structure depending on the context and/or situation.

- (27) a. A szövetminta rákos volt?
the tissue cancerous was
'Was the tissue cancerous?'
- b. [NegP Nem volt_i [TP **rákos** *t_i*]]
not was cancerous
'It wasn't cancerous.'

- (28) a. A betegtársad rákos volt?
 the fellow-patient-your cancerous was
 ‘Was your fellow-patient cancerous?’
- b. [NegP Nem [FocP RÁKOS_j volt_i [TP *t_j* *t_i*]]]
 not cancerous was
 ‘He was not CANCEROUS. [It was not cancerous that he was.]’

We can also form contrasting minimal pairs from predicates denoting seemingly similar properties. As shown by (29)–(30), *ősz* ‘grey-haired’ and *kopasz* ‘bald’ are construed as non-focused nominal predicates, whereas *szőke* ‘blond’ is construed as a focus in the most unmarked case.

- (29) a. Az apád ősz /kopasz volt?
 the father-your grey-haired/bald was
 ‘Was your father grey-haired/bald?’
- b. [NegP Nem volt_i [TP **ősz** /**kopasz** *t_i*]]]
 not was grey-haired /bald
 ‘He wasn’t grey-haired/bald.’
- (30) a. Az apád is szőke volt?
 the father-your also blond was
 ‘Was your father also blond?’
- b. [NegP Nem [FocP SZŐKE_j volt_i [TP *t_j* *t_i*]]]
 not blond was
 ‘He was not BLOND. [It was not blond that he was.]’

Interestingly, *sebész* ‘surgeon’ and *híres sebész* ‘famous surgeon’ also behave differently:

- (31) a. Az apád sebész volt?
 the father-your surgeon was
 ‘Was you father a surgeon?’
- b. [NegP Nem [FocP SEBÉSZ_j volt_i [TP *t_j* *t_i*]]]
 not surgeon was
 ‘He wasn’t a SURGEON. [It was not a surgeon that he was.]’
- (32) a. Az apád híres sebész volt?
 the father-your famous surgeon was
 ‘Was your father a famous surgeon?’

- b. [NegP Nem volt_i [TP híres sebész *t_i*]]
 not was famous surgeon
 ‘He wasn’t a famous surgeon.’

The comparison of these examples suggests that the answer contains a non-focused nominal predicate if the question wants to find out whether the subject does or does not have a given property (e.g., the property of being happy, bald-headed, or being a famous surgeon). The predicate is focused in case the subject is presupposed to have a certain property with alternative values, e.g., the property of having a hair color, or a profession, or, in the case of a patient, the property of having a disease, and the nominal predicate identifies the specific value of the property that holds for him.

Scalar adjectives representing opposite values, e.g., the equivalents of *tall-short*, *fat-thin*, *rich-poor*, *happy-unhappy*, *small-big*, *beautiful-ugly* are not focused in the unmarked case, i.e., apparently they are not regarded as alternative values of the same variable. Thus a subject is assumed either to have or not to have the property of being tall, or either to have or not to have the property of being short. Focusing is the preferred option if the alternative properties are of the same rank, as is the case with professions and nationalities.

Similarly to focusing in answers to quiz questions, predicate focusing is motivated by the [+presupposed] feature of the background. What is peculiar about this sentence type is that the background is not overt; it contains a trace of the subject, and an accommodated property description. This is how questions and answers with a focused nominal predicate are interpreted:

- (33) a. Is [Focus ENGLISH] [Background the nationality that you have]?
 b. [Background The nationality that I have] is not [Focus ENGLISH]
- (34) a. Is [Focus CANCER] [Background the disease that your fellow patient had]?
 b. [Background The disease that my fellow-patient had] is not [Focus CANCER].
- (35) a. Is [Focus BLOND] [Background the hair colour that your father had]?
 b. [Background The hair colour that my father had] is not [Focus BLOND].
- (36) a. Is [Focus SURGEON] [Background the profession that your father had]?
 b. [Background The profession that my father had] is not [Focus SURGEON].

Evidence for the presupposition is provided by the fact that negation in the answer leaves it intact.

In sum: Nominal predicates focused in the unmarked case do not differ from nominal predicates not requiring focusing either in respect of contextual givenness or in respect of exhaustivity. What they differ in is whether or not the nominal predicate specifies one of a set of alternative values of a property that the subject is presupposed to have. Like in the case of answers to quiz questions, the focused predicate does not carry any special semantic load, does not have a special information-structural function.

6 Conclusion

This paper has surveyed three constructions in which focusing does not yield a marked information structure; it is either obligatory or is the most unmarked option. The focus-moved constituent has the feature [+exhaustive], but the feature seems redundant or irrelevant, i.e., it is unlikely to be the trigger of focus-movement. In these sentence types, focusing mostly serves the subordination of the non-focus material into the background, where it is associated with a [+presupposed] feature. In answers to quiz questions, subordination is a means by which the description to be identified with the focused item can be presented as common knowledge. In titles of newspaper articles the subordination of the inferrable information serves the purpose of highlighting the most unexpected, most striking element of the proposition. In sentences involving a verb of coming into being or creation, the focusing of a constituent (mostly an adjunct) is a means by which the internal argument, whose creation the verb expresses, can be relegated to the background, where it is associated with an existential presupposition enabling it to assume a topic role. The paper has also discussed a type of nominal predicates which denote a value of a property that the subject is presupposed to have (e.g., a certain value of nationality, hair color, etc.). Apparently, the presupposed status of such properties requires (or at least licenses) the construction of the property value identified for the subject as a focus.

The fact that in these sentence types the focus-background articulation is motivated by the need of encoding the [+presupposed] feature of the background argues against the standard feature-checking approach to focusing, where focus movement is elicited by the need of checking the [+focus] and/or [+exhaustive] feature of a focus head. The sentence types examined are more compatible with the approach according to which focusing serves the purpose of creating a predication relation between the focussed constituent and the rest of the sentence, and the [+exhausti-

ve] feature of the focus and the [+presupposed] feature of the background are both consequences of the specificational predication relation that focus movement has established between them.

The sentence types examined represent “grammaticalized” focus-background structures, where the focus-background articulation is generalized without the speaker having any special, individual communicative intentions. The semantic-pragmatic weakening attested in these cases may indicate the evolution of a focus cycle. The syntactic weakening of focus movement has also been observed in a number of languages (languages focusing via clefting may reinterpret the cleft construction as a monoclausal structure with the subordinator functioning as a focus marker). It is a question for future generations whether the weakening of focusing leads in the long run to the evolution of a new focusing mechanism.

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Katalin É Kiss, Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Pázmány Péter Catholic University