

Research questions

- What are the main differences between the acquisition processes of the following 3 sentence types with respect to the exhaustive reading?
 - sentences with the focus particle *csak* 'only',
 - sentences with structural focus,
 - neutral SVO sentences?
- How do these results contribute to the semantic discussion concerning the exhaustive interpretation of these constructions?

Background

(i) sentences with the focus particle *csak* 'only'

- Horn (1969): sentences with focus particles – two meaning components
 - Only Muriel voted for Hubert.* (Horn 1969: 98)
 - Assertion: 'No one other than Muriel voted for Hubert'
 - Presupposition: 'Muriel voted for Hubert'
- Kenesei (1986, 1989), Szabolcsi (1994): the exhaustive implication of sentences with the particle *csak* 'only' is an **assertion**.

(ii) sentences with structural focus

- structural focus is syntactically and prosodically marked in Hungarian
 - Péter meg-vette a ház-at. \emptyset focus
Peter PRT-bought the house-ACC
'Peter bought the house.'
 - A HÁZ-AT vette meg Péter. Object focus
the house-ACC bought PRT Peter
'It was the house that Peter bought.'
- É. Kiss (1998): structural foci express exhaustive identification
- How do these sentences express the exhaustive meaning?
 - Szabolcsi (1981), É. Kiss (1998): [+ exhaustive] semantic feature
 - Kenesei (1986), Kálmán & van Leusen (1993), Szabolcsi (1994), Bende-Farkas (2009): the exhaustivity of structural focus is a **presupposition**
'The focus-containing utterance presupposes rather than asserts the uniqueness of its antecedent.'
(van Leusen & Kálmán 1993: 12)
 - Wedgwood (2005), Onea & Beaver (2011), Gerőcs, Babarczy & Surányi (2014): exhaustive interpretation is a **pragmatic implicature** in the case of sentences with and without structural focus alike
'The pragmatic tendency to interpret cooperative answers to questions as complete explains the exhaustivity effects.'
(Onea & Beaver 2011: 358)

(iii) neutral SVO sentences

- These constructions can also be interpreted exhaustively, however, this is only a **pragmatic implicature** arising in certain contexts.

Experiments

Participants: 4 age groups in each experiment: 1. 2. 3.
 • Preschoolers N = 3x15 mean ages: 5;11 6;2 6;4
 • 7-year-olds N = 3x15 mean ages: 7;2 7;5 7;6
 • 9-year-olds N = 3x15 mean ages: 9;3 9;7 9;8
 • Adults N = 3x15 mean ages: 37;5 42;7 22;10

Method: sentence-picture verification task

Participants had to judge a puppet's utterances on a 3-point scale:



cf. Katsos & Bishop (2011)

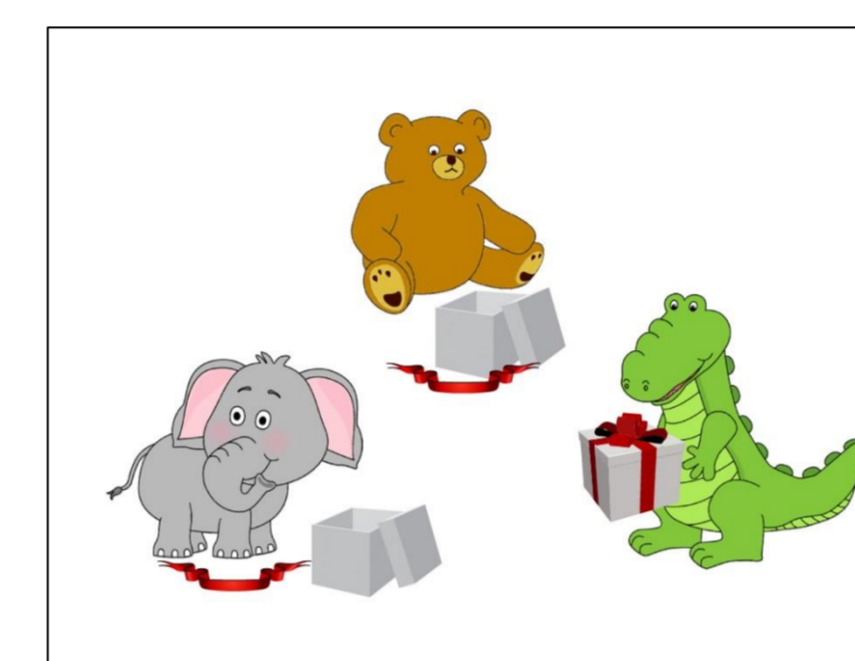
Balázs & Babarczy (2014)

Stimuli: 32 test items and 24 filler items were presented in a random order.

Conditions:



baseline: exhaustive condition



test: non-exhaustive condition

Experiment 1.

(4) *Csak A MACI nyitotta ki az ajándék-ot.*
 only the bear opened out the gift-ACC
 'Only the bear has opened the gift.'

sentences with *csak* 'only'

Experiment 2.

(5) *A MACI nyitotta ki az ajándék-ot.*
 the bear opened out the gift-ACC
 'It is the bear who has opened the gift.'

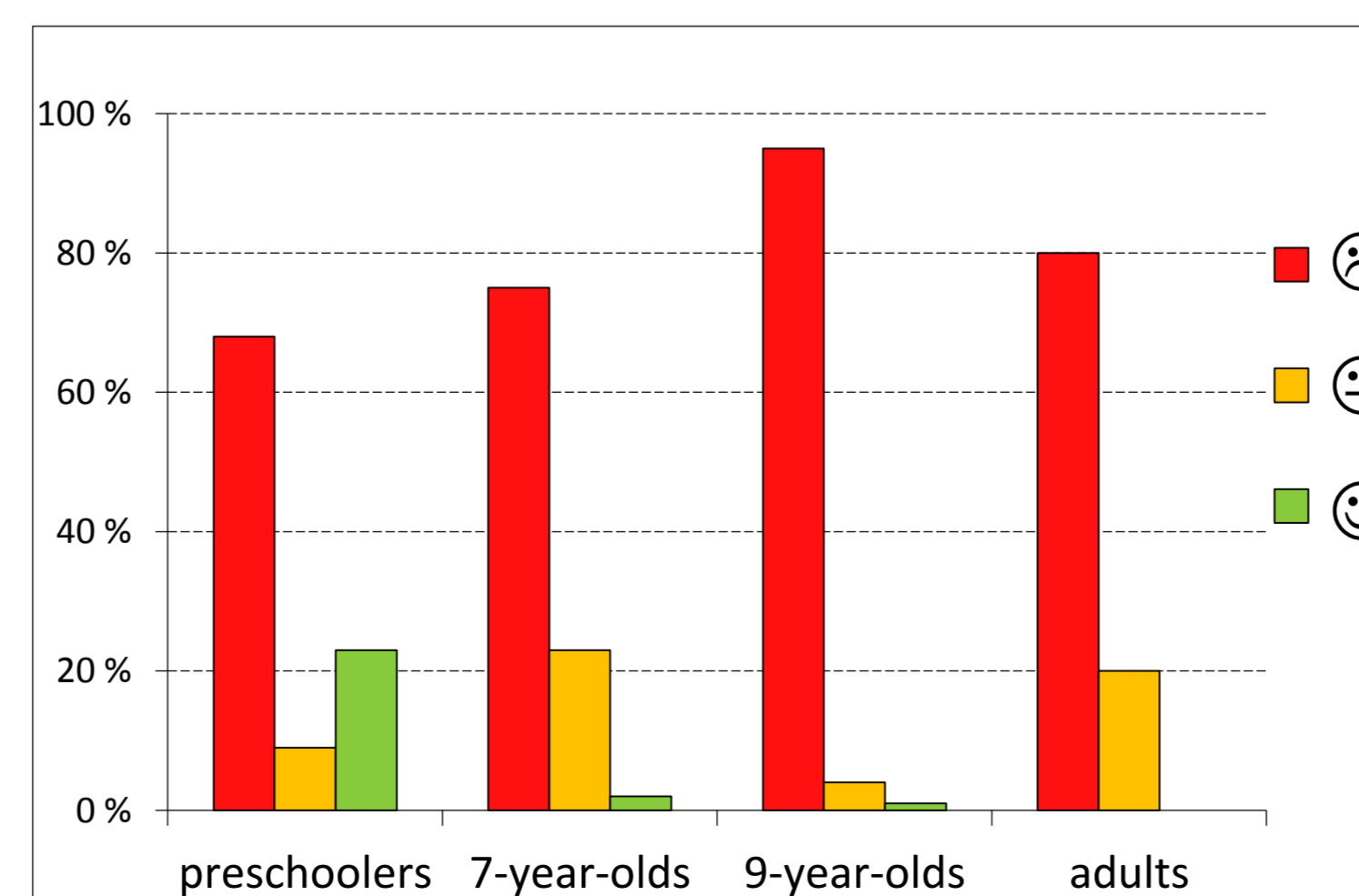
sentences with structural focus

Experiment 3.

(6) *A maci ki-nyitotta az ajándék-ot.*
 the bear out-opened the gift-ACC
 'The bear has opened the gift.'

neutral SVO sentences

Results – Experiment 1



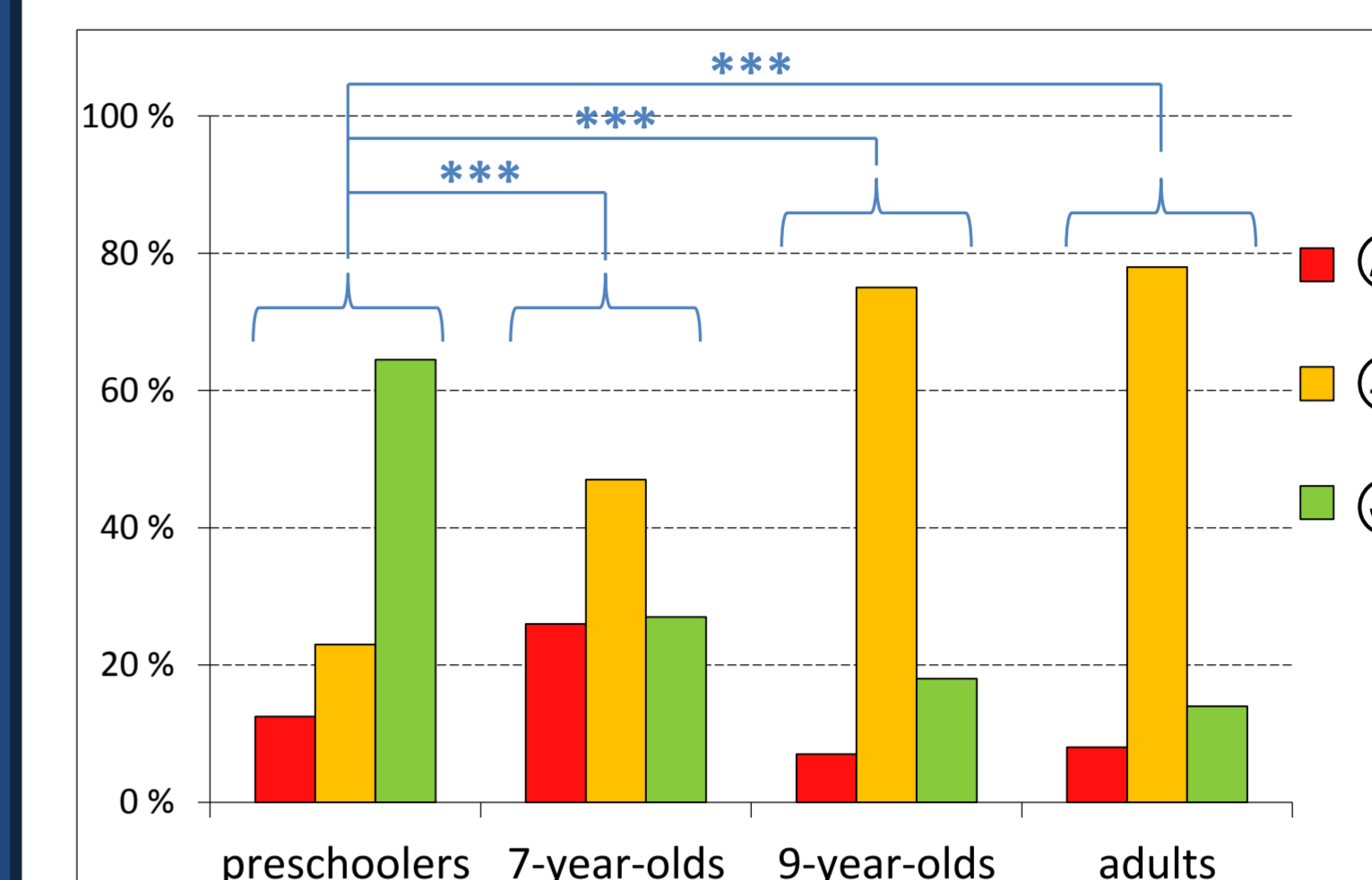
Results of the non-exhaustive condition of Experiment 1

→ This is in line with the claim that exhaustivity is asserted in the case of *csak*.

In each age group, participants overwhelmingly rejected the sentences with *csak* 'only' in the non-exhaustive condition.

The results of the age groups did not differ significantly according to Kruskal-Wallis rank sum test – neither in the baseline condition ($H(3)=1.04$, $p=0.7928$), nor in the critical condition ($H(3)=4.74$, $p=0.192$).

Results – Experiment 2



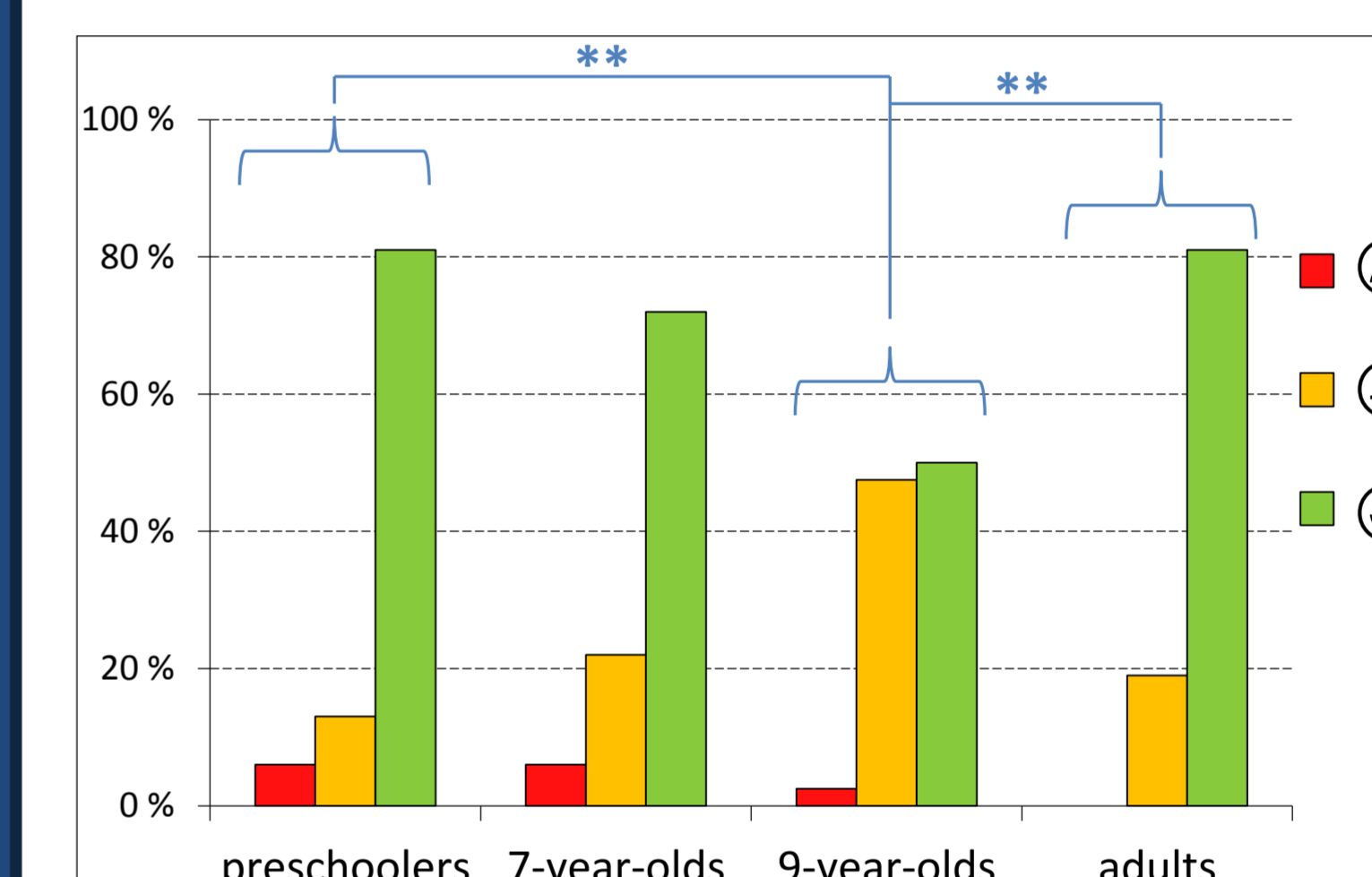
Results of the non-exhaustive condition of Experiment 2

In the case of structural focus, there is an increase of exhaustive interpretation with age.

In the test condition, scores given by preschoolers differed significantly from those of other age groups: $H(3)=19.8$, $p=0.0001866$.

→ Exhaustivity encoded by a specific syntactic configuration is harder for them to process.

Results – Experiment 3



Results of the non-exhaustive condition of Experiment 3

Neutral SVO sentences were mostly accepted in the non-exhaustive condition.

→ Participants do not interpret these sentences exhaustively when there are no contextual cues to trigger the generation of an implicature.

Only the scores of 9-year-olds differed from other age groups ($H(3)=11.45$, $p=0.0095$).

Conclusion

- Experimental data support the view that there are three different kinds of exhaustivity in the three discussed constructions:
 - exhaustivity of sentences with *csak* – assertion
 - exhaustivity of sentences with structural focus – presupposition
 - occasional exhaustivity of neutral SVO sentences – pragmatic implicature
- Younger children performed in a non-adultlike fashion only in the case of sentences with structural focus where exhaustivity is encoded by syntax.

Selected references

- É. Kiss, K. 1998. Identificational focus versus information focus. *Language* 74: 245–73.
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Acknowledgement

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