The acquisition of the exhaustive interpretation of Hungarian focus constructions

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- **Research questions**
- Background
- Experiments
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusion

Research questions

1. Regarding the exhaustive reading, what are the main differences between the acquisition processes of the following 3 sentence types:

(i) sentences with ***csak*** 'only',

(ii) sentences with **structural focus**,

(iii) **neutral SVO** sentences?

2. How do these results contribute to the semantic discussion concerning the exhaustive interpretation of these constructions?

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Background – *csak* 'only'

Horn (1969): sentences containing focus particles have **two meaning components**

(1) *Only Muriel voted for Hubert.*   (Horn 1969: 98)

Assertion: 'No one other than Muriel voted for Hubert'
(negative contribution)

Presupposition: 'Muriel voted for Hubert'
(positive contribution, prejacent)

Hungarian *csak*: Kenesei (1986), Szabolcsi (1994)

(2) *Csak Péter alszik.*   (Kenesei 1986: 134)

Background – *csak* 'only'

Different proposals regarding the status of the prejacent:
- Horn (1996): presupposition of existence

  ('Someone voted for Hubert')
- van Rooij & Schulz (2005): conversational implicature
- Beaver & Clark (2008), Roberts (2011): backgrounded
                                          entailment

Consensus: the exhaustive implication is an **assertion**
Roberts (2011) – proffered content

Background – structural focus

structural / pre-verbal / identificational focus
- syntactically and prosodically marked

(3) *PÉTER aludt a padlón.*   (Szabolcsi 1981: 144)

    'It was Peter who slept on the floor.'

What does structural focus express?
- exclusion by identification (Kenesei 1986)
- exhaustive identification (É. Kiss 1998)
- specificational predicate (Higgins 1973, É. Kiss 2011)

Background – structural focus

How does sentences conatining structural focus express this exhaustive meaning?

1. [**+exhaustive**] **semantic featur**e

    Szabolcsi 1981, É. Kiss 1998, among others

2. **presupposition**

    Kenesei 1986, van Leusen & Kálmán 1993, Szabolcsi 1994, Bende-Farkas 2009, É. Kiss 2011

    "The focus-containing utterance *presupposes* rather than *asserts* the uniqueness of its antecedent."

    (van Leusen & Kálmán 1993: 12)

Background – structural focus

3. **implicature**

   - conversational implicature

    Wedgwood 2003, 2005; Onea & Beaver 2011

    "The pragmatic tendency to interpret cooperative answers to questions as complete then explains the exhaustivity effects."

                      (Onea & Beaver 2011: 358)

   - conventional implicature

    Gerőcs, Babarczy & Surányi 2014

Background – Previous experiments I.

Onea & Beaver (2011)

(4) a. *Csak MARCI fogott meg egy lepkét.*

   b. *MARCI fogott meg egy lepkét.*

   c. *Marci megfogott egy lepkét.*

Possible responses:

Yes, and Peter caught a butterfly too.

Yes, but Peter caught a butterfly too.

No, Peter caught a butterfly too.

Background – Previous experiments I.

Onea & Beaver (2011)
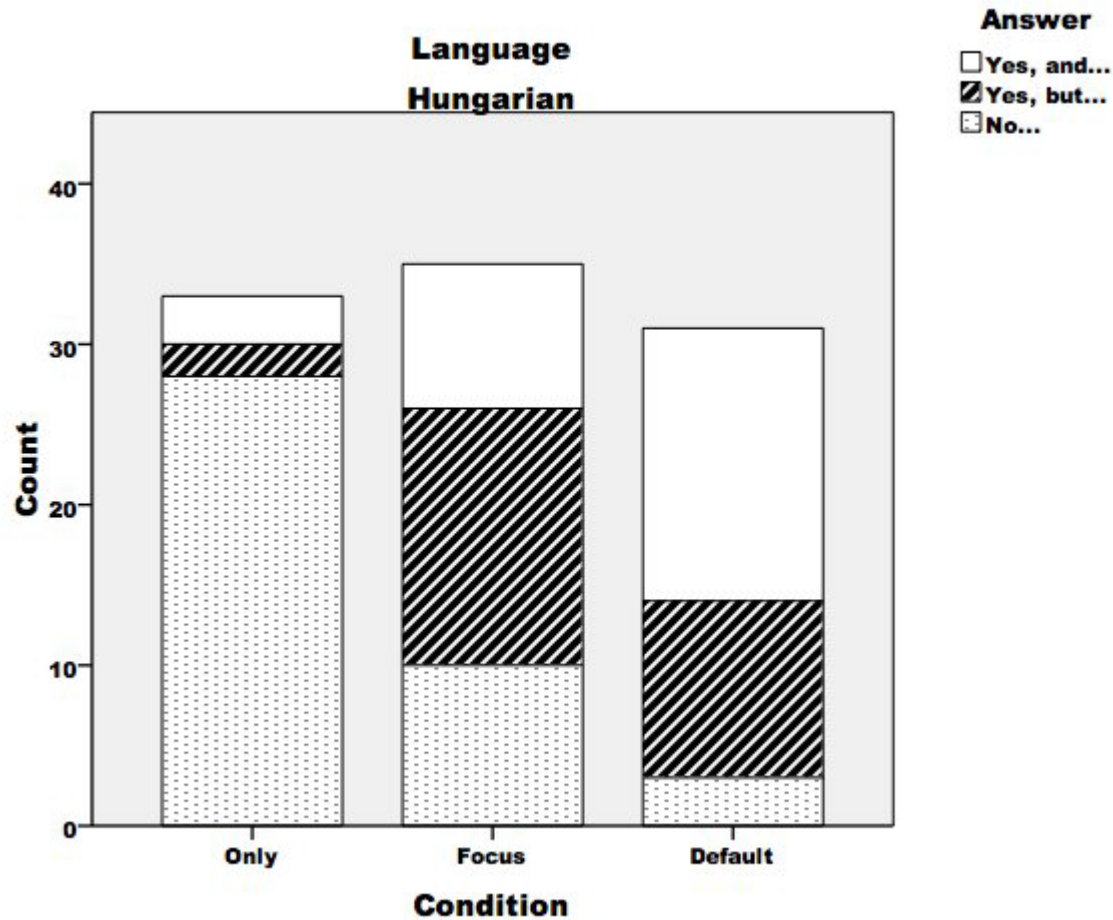
Background – Previous experiments II.

Gerőcs, Babarczy & Surányi (2014)

Experiment 1 – online truth-value judgment task

Experiment 2 – offline, indirect task

→ Exhaustivity of structural focus is due to a
   conventional implicature

   - an implicature associated with a particular form;

   - answer to the Question under Discussion
     (Roberts 1998)

Background – Previous experiments III.

Kas & Lukács (2013) – acqusitional study

Truth Value Judgment task – binary yes/no answers
(not suitable for testing theories concerning the
semantic status of exhaustivity)

- Neither 6-year-olds nor 10-year-olds showed any
   sign of focus sensitivity as a group.

- Responses of adults were inconsistent too.

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3 experiments

Experiment 1. (sentences with structural focus)
(1) *A NYUSZI*   *emelte fel*   *a*   *zászlót.*
   the rabbit   raised   up   the   flag-ACC
   'It is the rabbit who has raised the flag.'

Experiment 2. (sentences with *csak* 'only')
(2) *Csak a   nyuszi*   *emelte fel*   *a*   *zászlót.*
   only   the   rabbit raised up   the   flag-ACC
   'It is only the rabbit who has raised the flag.'

Experiment 3. (neutral SVO sentences)
(3) *A nyuszi*   *fel-emelte*   *a*   *zászlót.*
   the rabbit   up-raised   the   flag-ACC
   'The rabbit has raised the flag.'

Conditions of Experiment 1–3.

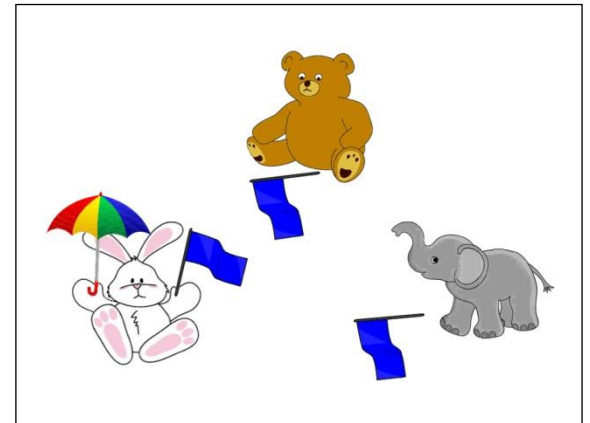Control conditions:
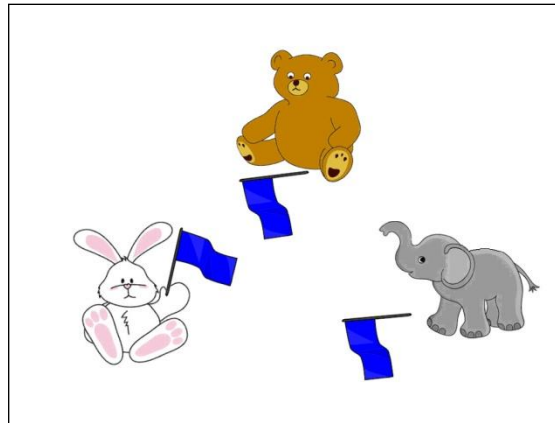
(i) true / exhaustive condition
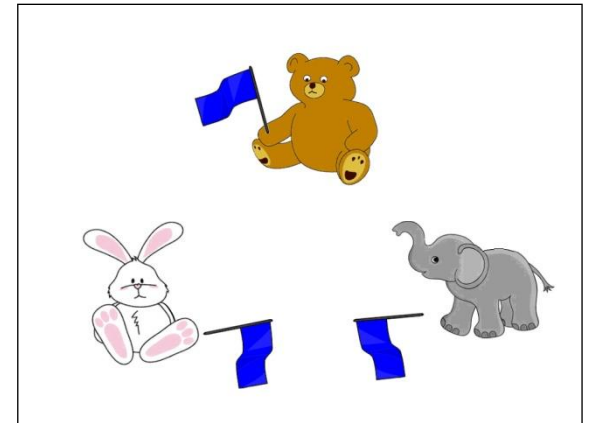
(ii) false condition

Critical conditions:
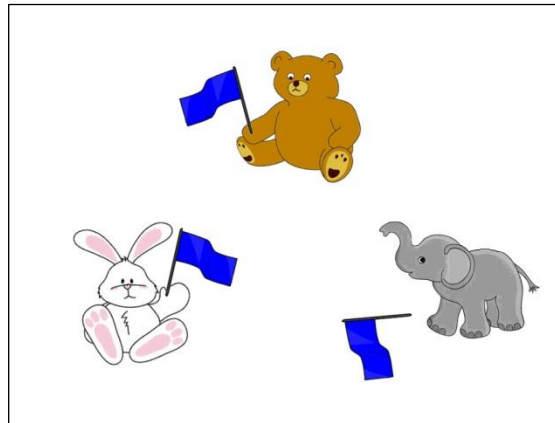
(iii) non-exhaustive condition

(iv) condition (i) with a distractor

Procedure

Sentence – picture verification task (Experiment 1 – 3)

Experiment 1 – 1a: yes/no answers

        – 1b: 3-point-scale

cf. Katsos & Bishop (2011)

Balázs & Babarczy (in press)

4 conditions x 8 items = 32 test sentence-picture pairs

+ 24 filler sentence-picture pairs

• randomized order, SR Research Experiment Builder

• 2 occasions

Procedure

Participants:

4 age groups in each experiments (Exp 1a, 1b, 2, 3)

- 15 **preschoolers** (mean ages: 5;9, 6;2, 5;9 and 6;4)

- 15 **7-year-olds** (mean ages: 7;5, 7;2, 7;5 and 7;6)

- 15 **9-year olds** (mean ages: 9;7, 9;7, 9;3 and 9;6)

- 15 **adults** (mean ages: 22;7, 37;5, 42;7, and 22;10)

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Acceptance ratings of sentences with structural focus (**Experiment 1a and 1b**) in **non-exhaustive contexts**
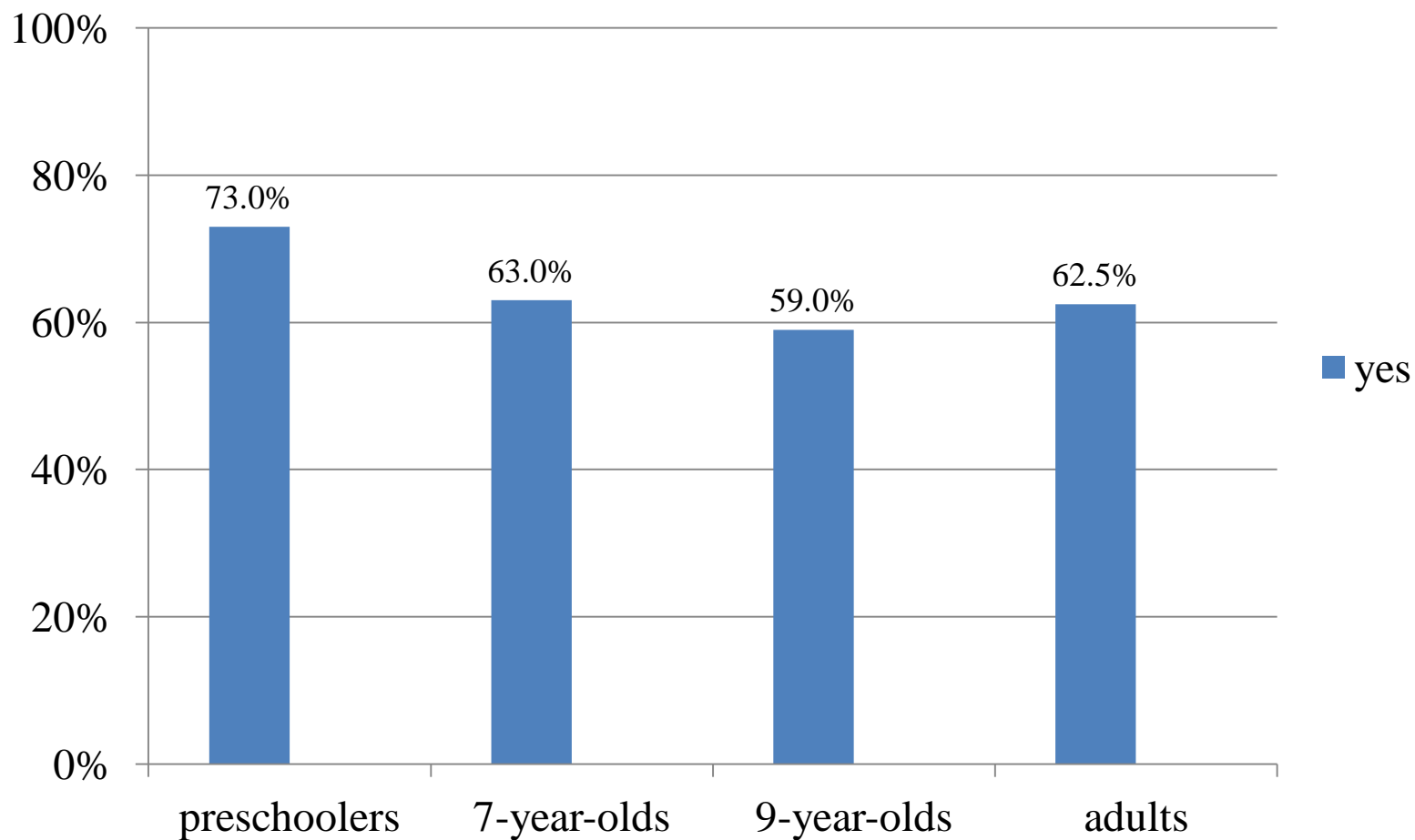
# Acceptance ratings of sentences with structural focus (**Experiment 1a and 1b**) in **non-exhaustive contexts**
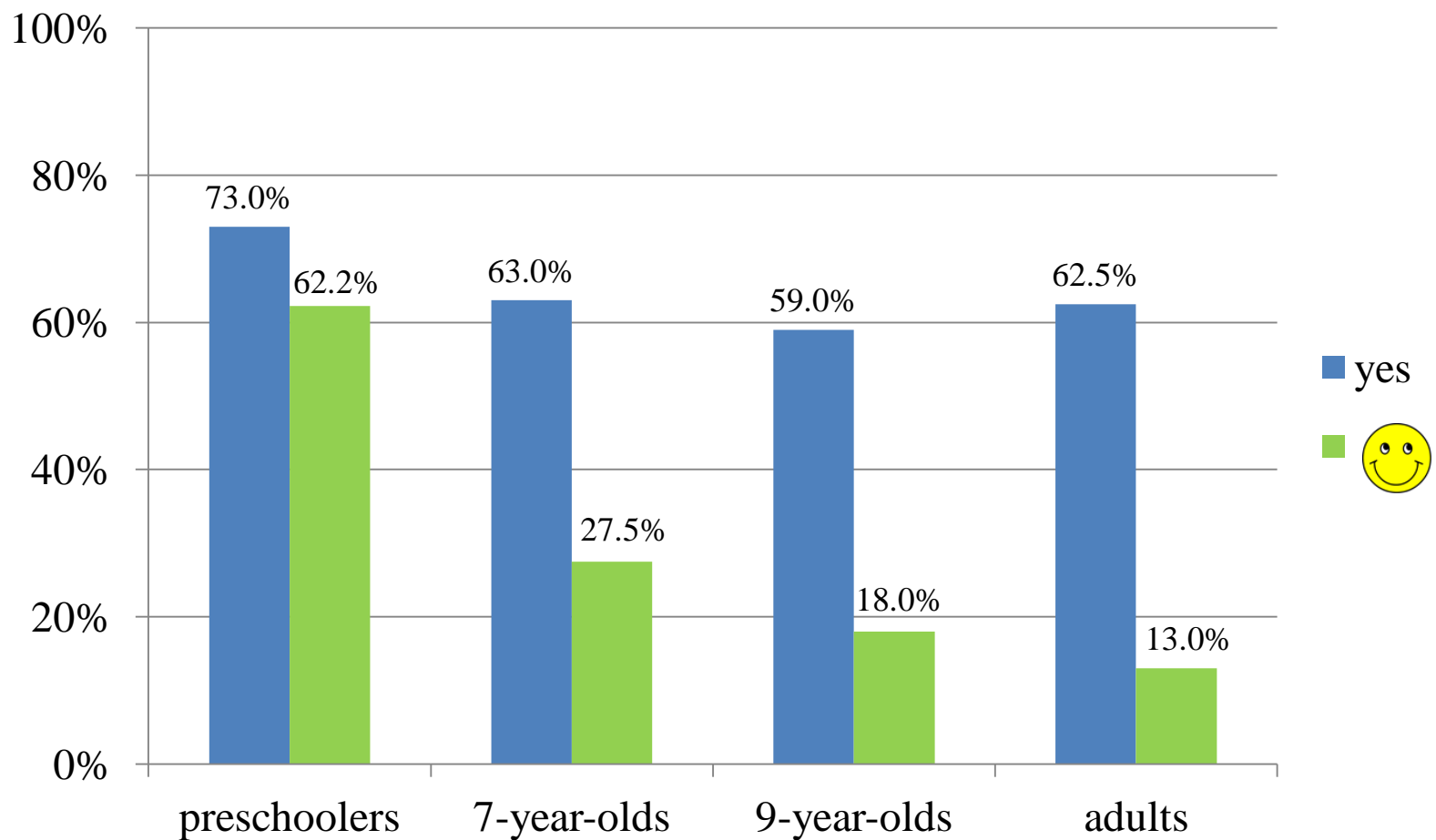
Results of Experiment 1a and 1b

- Experiments using a binary judgment are not suitable to point out the exhaustivity of structural focus.

- In what follows, I am only discussing the results of Experiment 1b.

- In the next experiments, I am going to use the three-point scale.

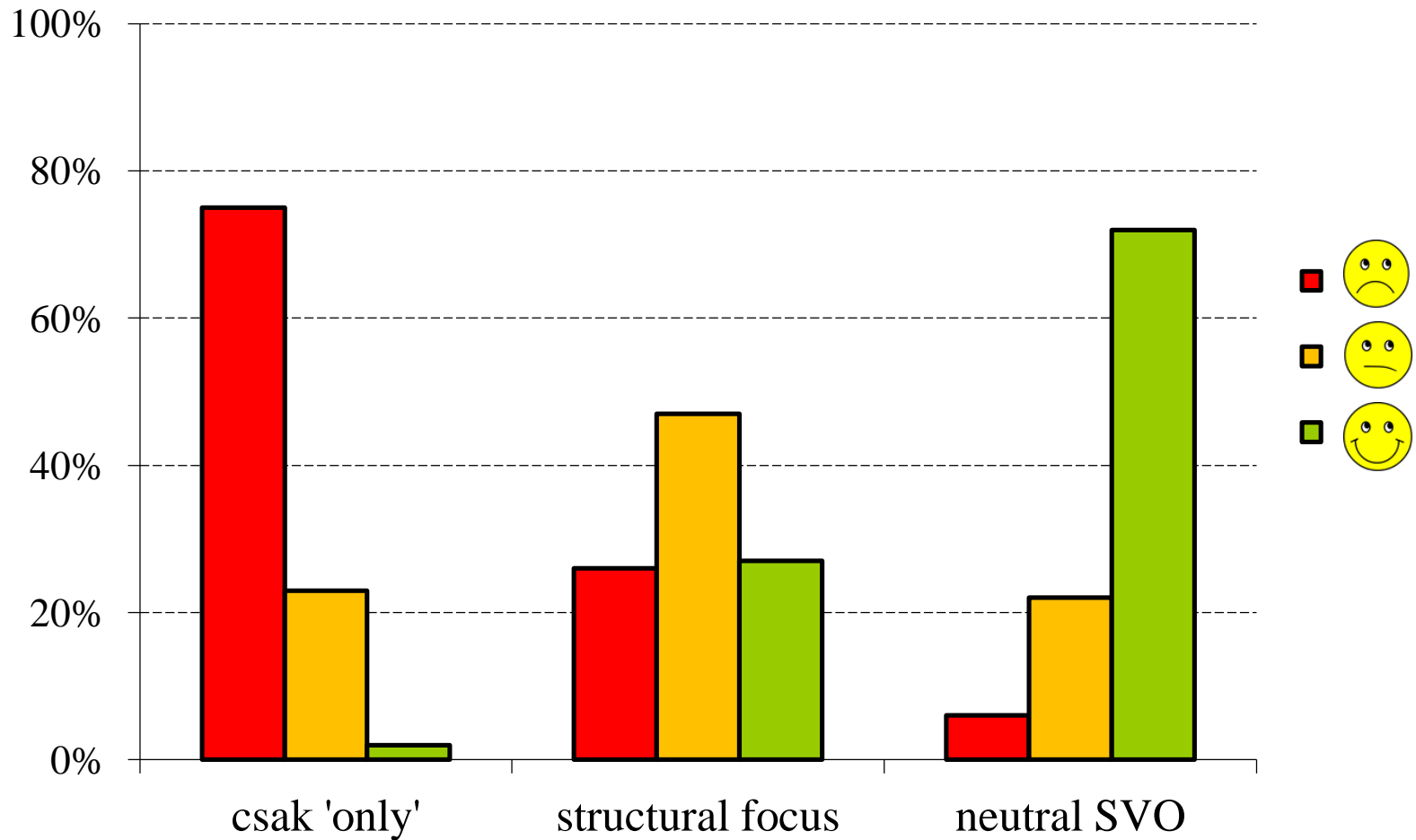# Results of the **adult** control groups in the **non-exhaustive conditions** of Experiment 1 – 3

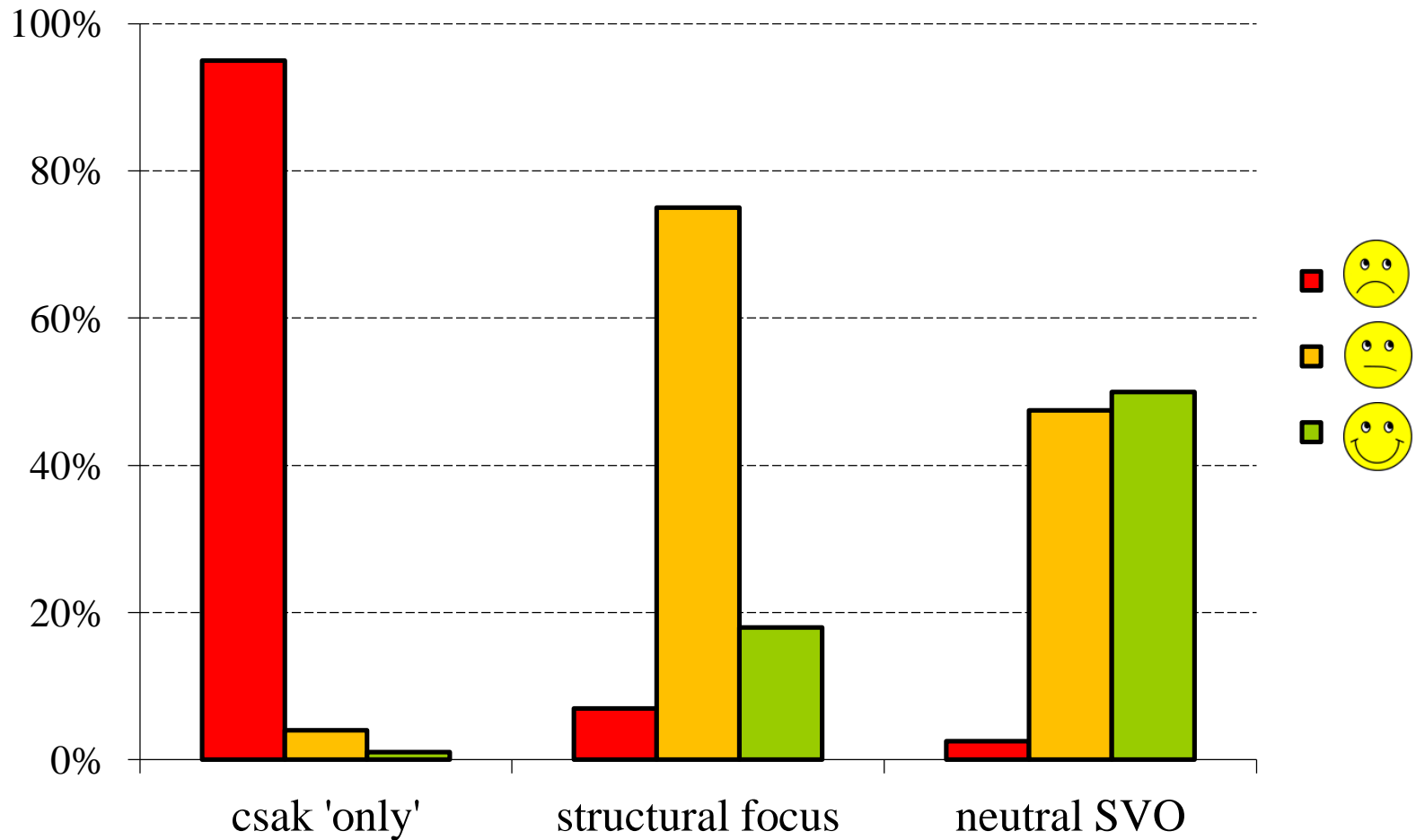# Results of the **adult** control groups in the **non-exhaustive conditions** of Experiment 1 – 3
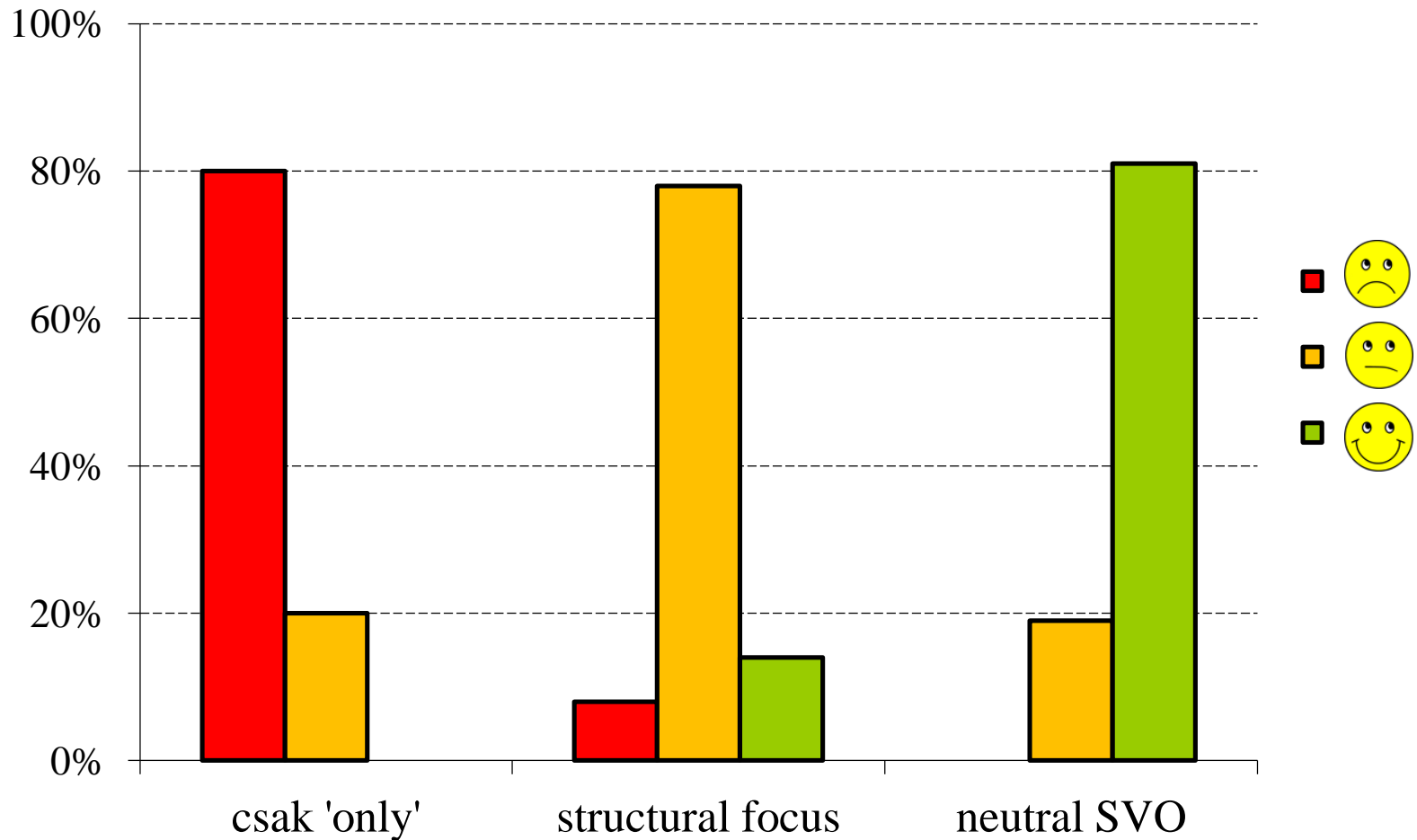
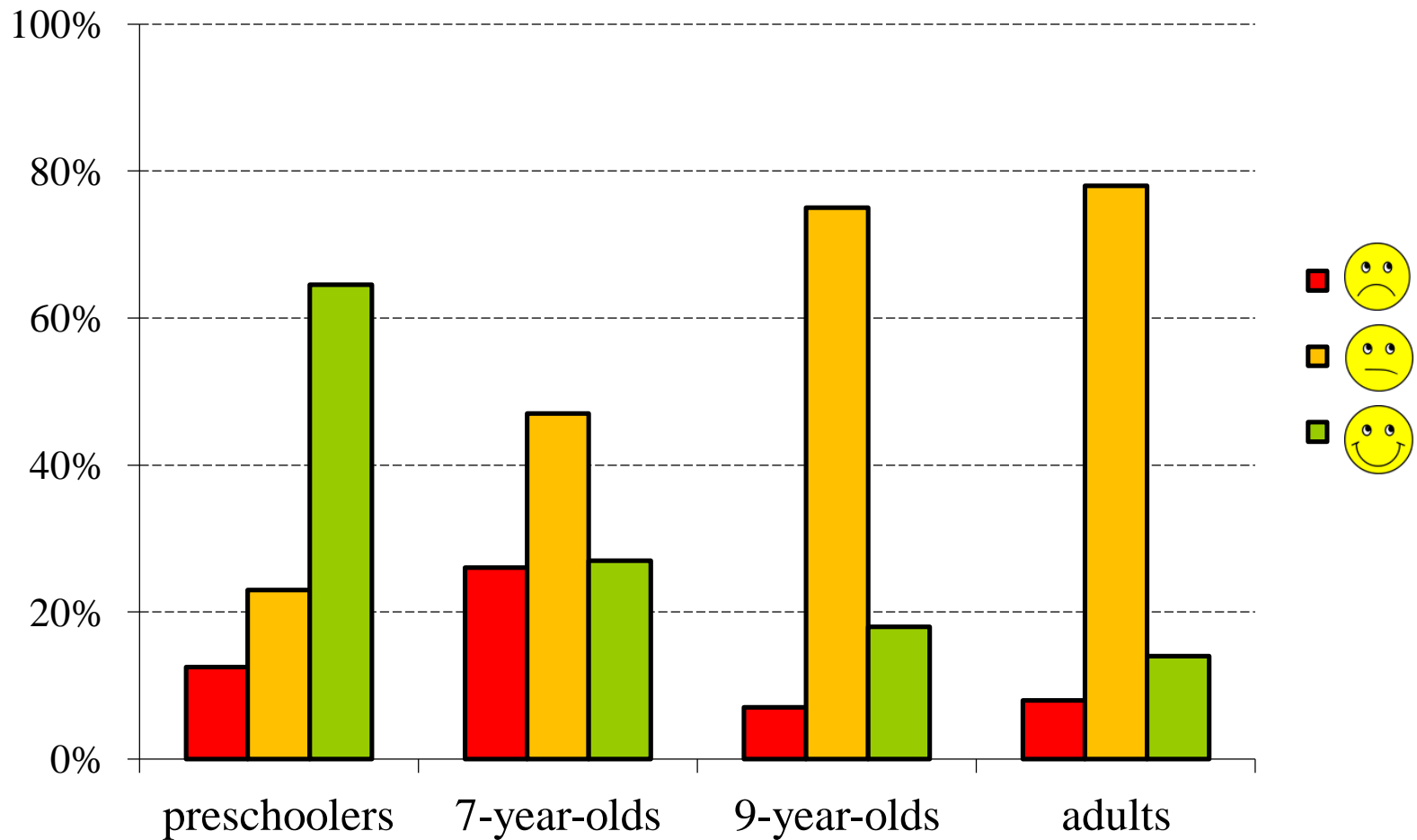# Results of the **preschoolers** in the **non-exhaustive conditions** of Experiment 1 – 3
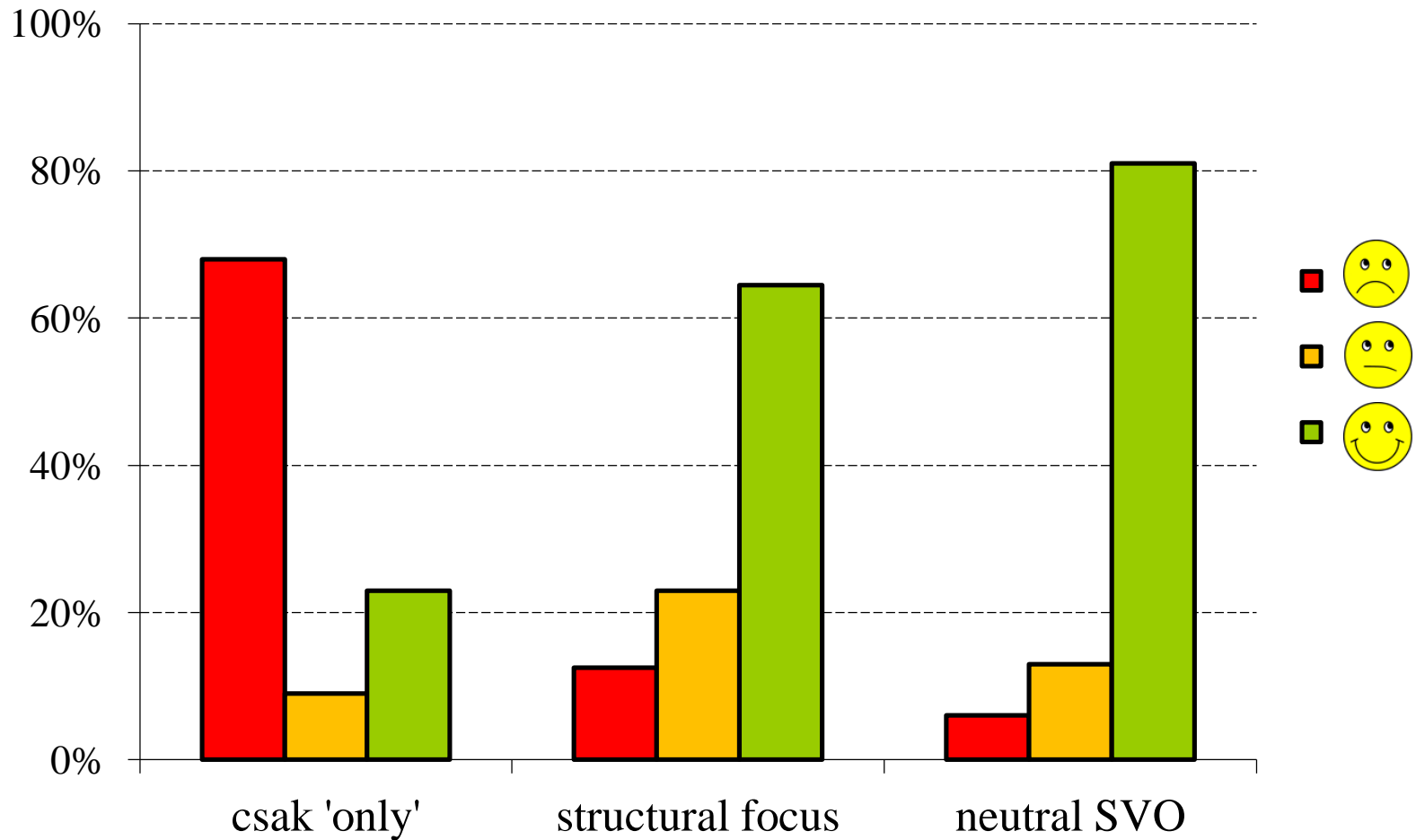
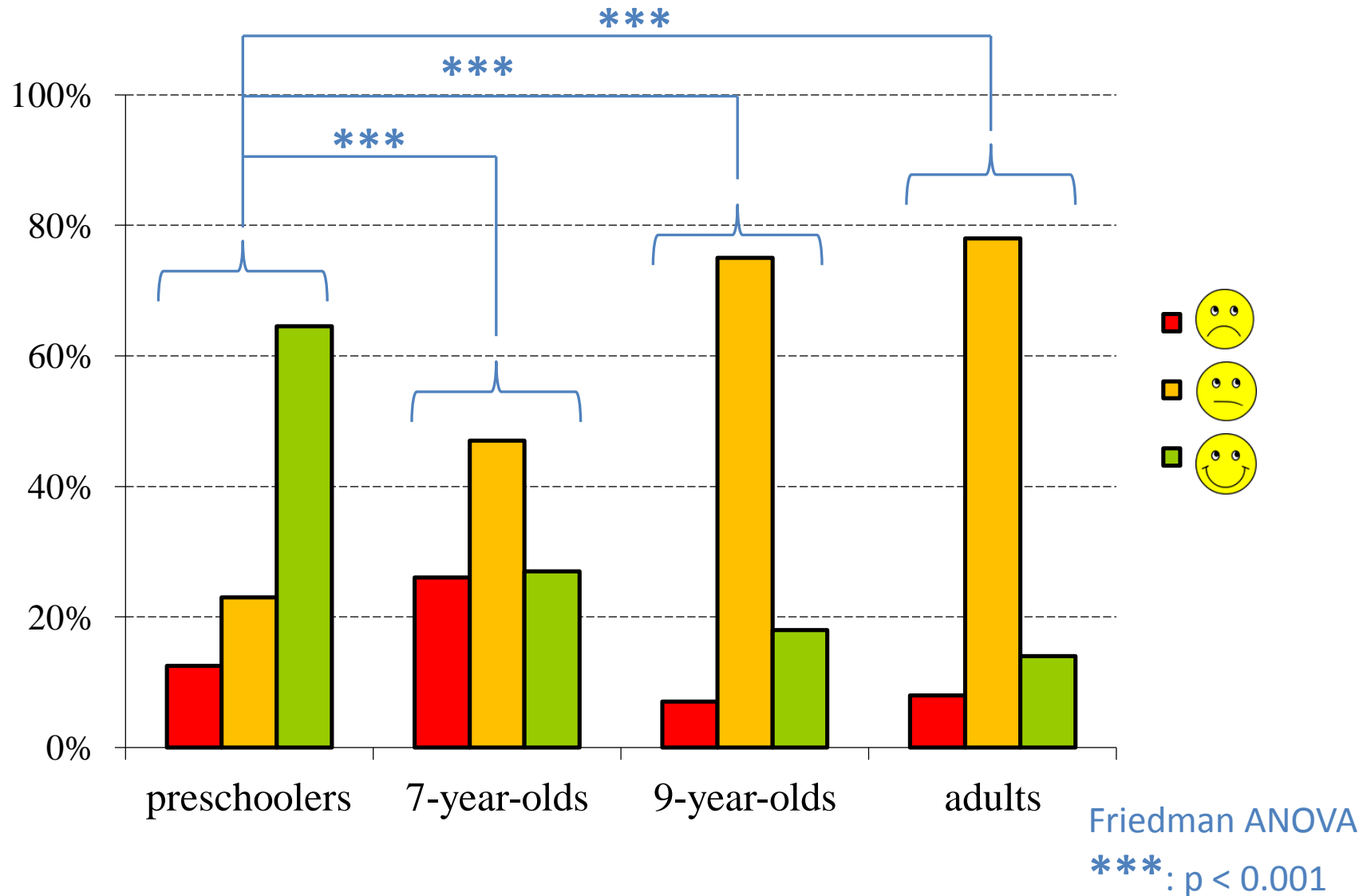# Results of the **7-year-olds** in the **non-exhaustive conditions** of Experiment 1 – 3

Results of the **9-year-olds** in the **non-exhaustive conditions** of Experiment 1 – 3

Proportion of responses of the **non-exhaustive condition** of **Experiment 1b** (structural focus)

Proportion of responses of the **non-exhaustive condition** of **Experiment 1b** (structural focus)

Friedman ANOVA
***: p < 0.001

Proportion of responses of **true plus distractor condition** of **Experiment 1b** (structural focus)
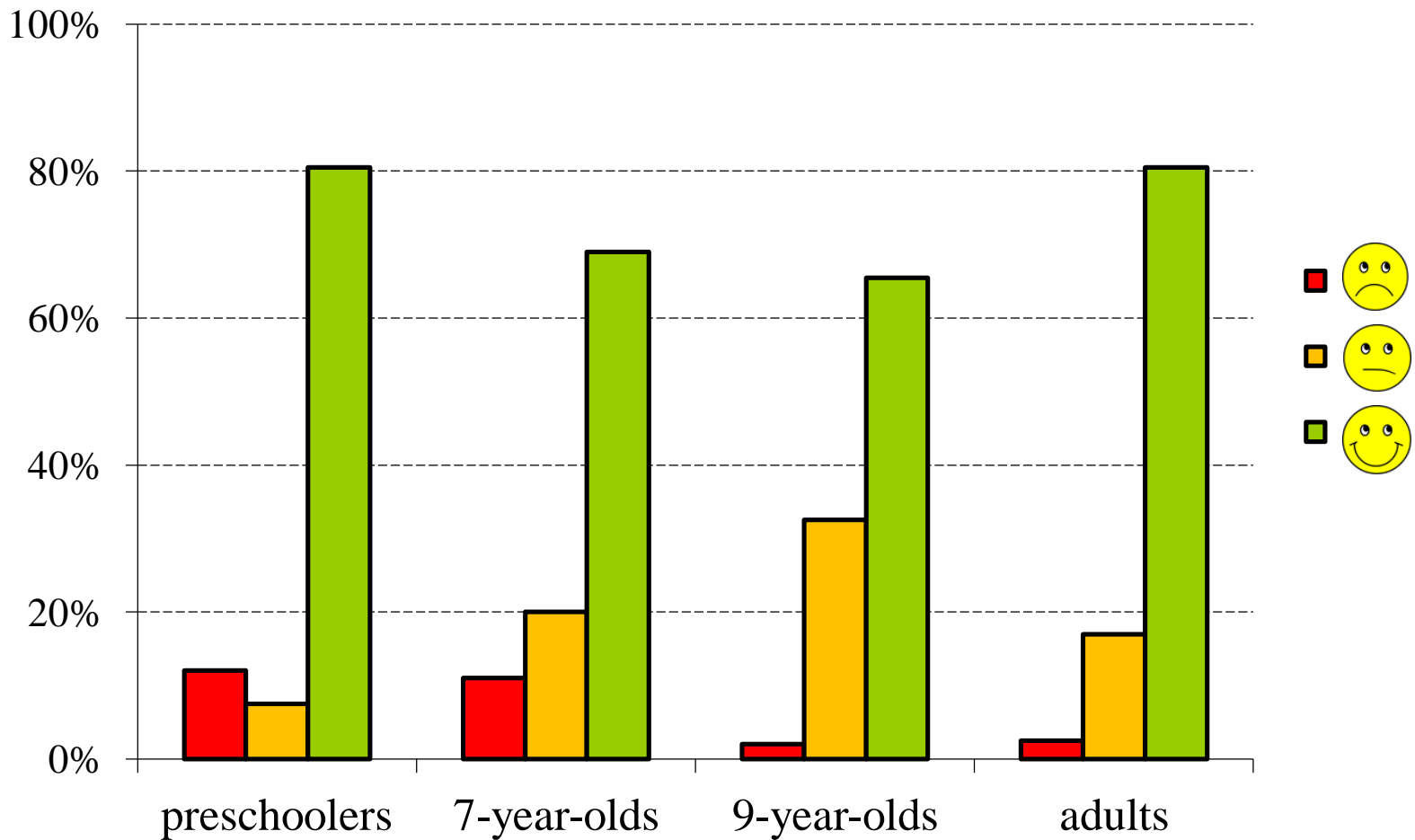
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Discussion – Findings

- No difference between the age groups in the interpretation of csak 'only'.

- In the case of neutral SVO sentences, only 9-year-olds differed from other age groups.

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

  → Exhaustivity encoded by a specific syntactic configuration is harder for children to process.
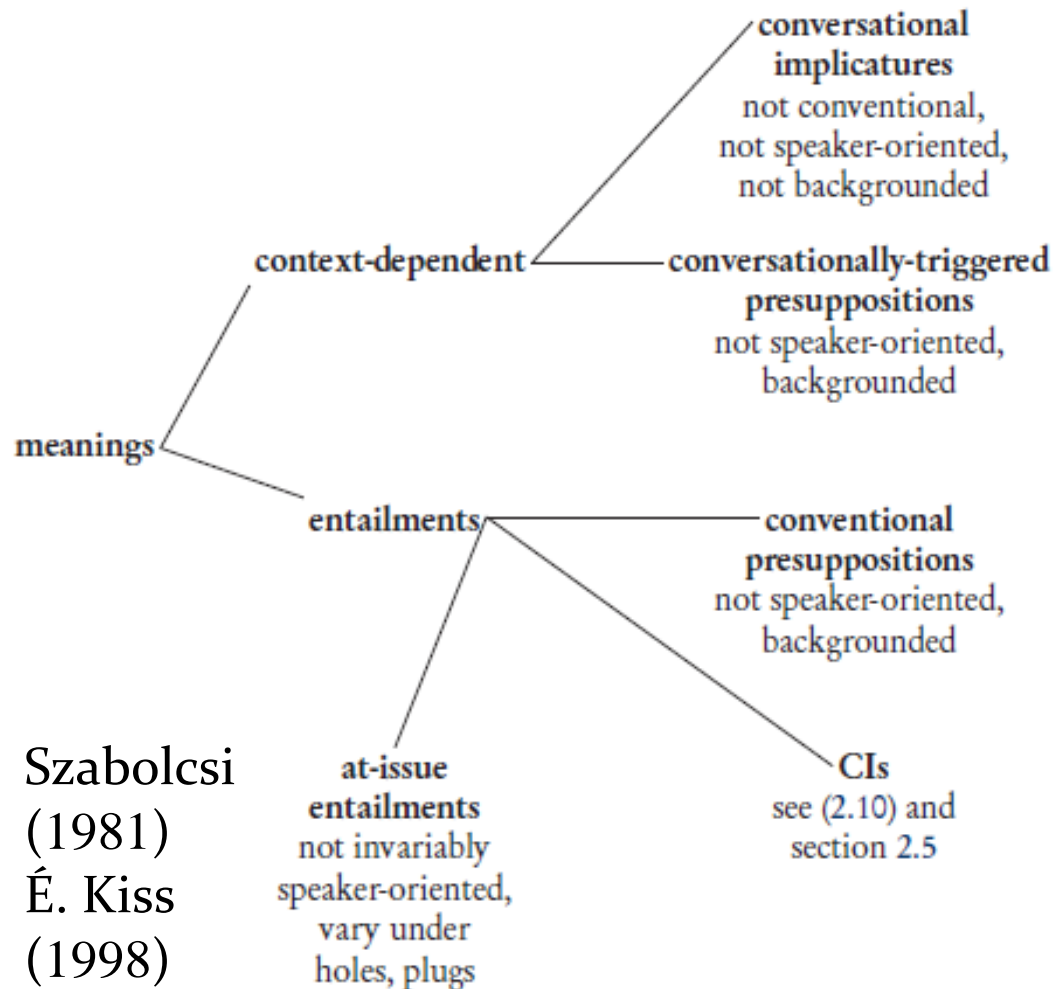
Discussion – The exhaustivity issue
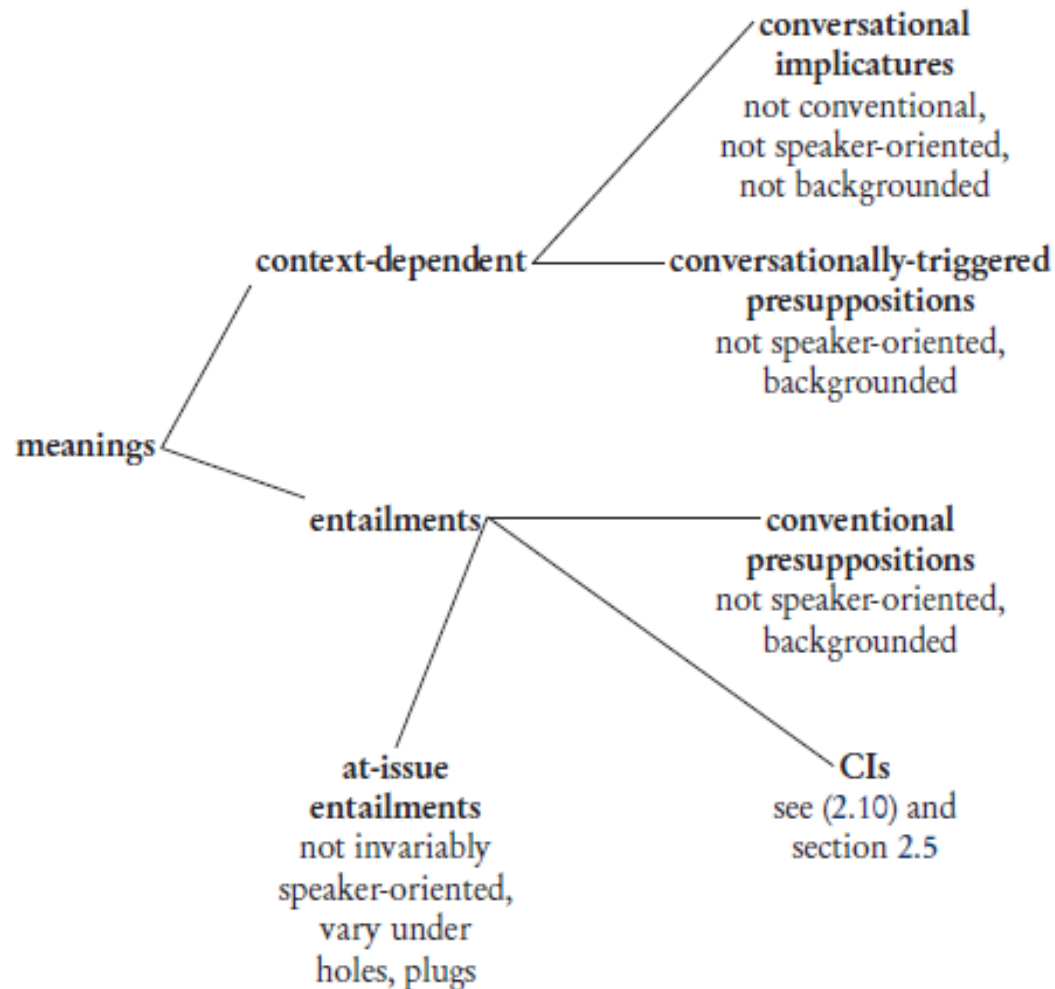
Potts (2005: 23)

Discussion – The exhaustivity issue

Potts (2005: 23)

Wedgwood (2005)
Onea & Beaver (2011)

van Leusen & Kálmán (1993)

Kenesei (1986),
Szabolcsi (1994),
Bende-Farkas (2009)

Szabolcsi (1981)
É. Kiss (1998)

Gerőcs, Babarczy & Surányi (2014)

Discussion – The exhaustivity issue

- At-issue meanings can be ruled out, because of the differences between Experiment 1b and 2. (structural focus vs. csak)

- Context dependent meanings can be excluded, because of the differences between Experiment 1b and 3. (structural focus vs. neutral SVO)

Discussion – The exhaustivity issue

- Conventional implicatures:

"In some cases the conventional meaning of the words used will determine what is implicated, besides helping to determine what is said." (Grice 1967)

(5) *He is an Englishman; he is, therefore, brave.*

(Grice 1967: 24)

Potts (2005): CIs are speaker-oriented entailments which are independent of the at-issue entailments.

(6) *Sheila believes that Chuck, a <u>psychopath</u>, is fit to watch the kids.*

(Potts 2005: 117)

Discussion – The exhaustivity issue

- Conventional presupposition seems to be a good candidate

- Gazdar (1979: 108): conventional presuppositions arising through syntactic operations (e.g. clefting)

- see also Karttunen (1974), Büring and Križ (2013)

- Potts (2005): speaker-oriented, backgrounded meanings that are not easily altered by contextual factors.

→ Adopting the view of Kenesei (1986), Szabolcsi (1994), Bende-Farkas (2009) with modification: exhaustivity is a **conventional presupposition**

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Conclusions

Experimental data support the view that there are 3 different kinds of exhaustivity in the 3 discussed constructions.

- Csak – **assertion**

- Structural focus – **conventional presupposition**

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

Thank you for your attention!