# Contextual triggers of the pre-verbal focus word order – A guided production study

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Typologically, Hungarian is a discourse configurational language [1][2], i.e. the discourse-semantic functions of Topic and Focus are associated with particular structural configurations. The present study examines Focus, whose relevant structural properties are as follows: the focused element is immediately pre-verbal, the verbal modifier (if present) is post-verbal. We use the theory neutral name pre-verbal focus (preVf) to refer to this structure.

Having established that the use of preVf is discourse dependent, the question is given: what properties of discourse trigger the structural configuration associated with preVf? The present study attempts to contribute with empirical data to this question. Based on what has most prominently been discussed in the literature, we investigated the function of (i) identification [3][4] and (ii) contrast [5].

(i) [6] and [7] suggest that the diagnostics for identification is achievable through certain question types. More precisely, an identification focus construction [3] is licensed in contexts where the focus containing sentence is an answer to a question as in (1a). However, a question in (1b) triggers broad focus [8], which is, in Hungarian, realized in the neutral word order, as in the answer in (1b). Taken together, the theory thus predicts that the questions in (1) trigger their corresponding answers as given.

(1) a. Q: **Mit veszített el Mari?**            A: **Mari egy gyűrűt veszített el.**
        What did Mary loose?                      Mary lost a 'ring.

    b. Q: **Miért szomorú Mari?**            A: **Mari elveszített egy gyűrűt.**
        Why is Mary sad?                         Mary lost a ring.

(ii) [5] claims that preVf is inherently contrastive, since it designates a subset of a contextually given set. What is contrasted is the element(s) in the set designated by the preVf sentence and the contextually defined set. In this respect a preVf sentence (3a) is predicted to fit the context in (2a) below.

(2) a. **A gyerekeknek kiosztottak egy csomó játékkockát. Ezekből mindenfélét össze lehetett rakni; például várat, tornyot, házat.**
        The kids were handed out lots of building blocks. Anything could be built out of them: for example a castle, a tower or a house.

    b. **A gyerekeknek kiosztottak egy csomó játékkockát. Ezekből mindenfélét össze lehetett rakni.**
        The kids were handed out lots of building blocks. Anything could be built out of them.

    c. **A játéksarokban:**
        In the playing corner:

    d. **Bence már korábban is sok tornyot épített kockákból, így most is ezt csinálta.**
        Ben had built a lot of towers before, so he did that again now.

    e. **Bence már álmos volt, így csak a többi gyereket nézte.**
        Ben was sleepy, so he just watched the others play.

(3) a. **Misi egy várat rakott össze.**
        Mike built a 'tower/It was a tower that Mike built.

    b. **Misi összerakott egy várat.**
        Mike built a tower.

According to [5] "whether or not the contrasting complementary set is explicit, in the case of contrastive focus (i.e. preVf) a complementary set is always created" (p. 137). Thus, (3a) is also predicted to fit (2b). Moreover, (2d) in itself also triggers contrast regarding the entity (tower) that is the referent of its focused constituent. Therefore, (3a) is also predicted to fit (2d). However, since (2c) and (2e) do not mention any entity in any set that could be contrasted, (3b), a neutral sentence is predicted to follow them.

To test the above predictions on preVf triggering factors, we ran two online surveys. In both surveys respondents were shown a context text and a set of words in a cloud-like random arrangement. The experimental task was to create sentences that naturally fit the context by consecutively clicking the words in the cloud. In the first test we included questions similar to (1a) and (1b) (narrow- and wide-cond.) and contexts similar to (2a) either followed by (2d) or (2e) (contrast and no-contrast cond.). The second test included sentence combinations similar to (2a) together with (2d) or (2e) (explicit set, contrast and no-contrast cond.), (2b) with (2d)

or (2e) (implicit set, contrast and no-contrast cond.), or only a label for a situation as in (2c) combined with (2d) or (2e) (no set, contrast and no-contrast cond.). In the two surveys data from 68 and 118 respondents were analyzed, respectively.

The Results from Exp. 1 indicate a sharp contrast in preVf response rates between the narrow (M = .74, SD = .27) and broad (M = .17, SD = .02) question conditions (z = −9.06, $p$ < .001). There was also a significant difference in preVf response rates between the contrast (M = .83, SD = .18) and no-contrast (M = .6, SD = .27) context conditions (z = −3.48, $p$ < .001). The results of Exp. 2 reveal that the presence or absence of an explicit or implicit set had no significant effect on word order choices in contrast context conditions, while in no-contrast context conditions preVf was less likely to be used when no set was specified (M = .49, SD = .26) than when a set was either explicitly (M = .69, SD = .24; z = 3.67, $p$ = .001) or implicitly (M = .62, SD = .24; z = 2.54, $p$ = .05) given.

Results suggest that i) contexts of identification (1a) trigger preVf word order (as opposed to 1b), ii) the presence of both an explicit and an implicit set (2a, 2b) trigger preVf word order (as opposed to 2c), iii) even if a given set is explicit or implicit, entity-contrast (2d) triggers preVf (as opposed to 2e), iv) in the absence of contexts of identification and contrast the preVf word order is not reliably triggered.
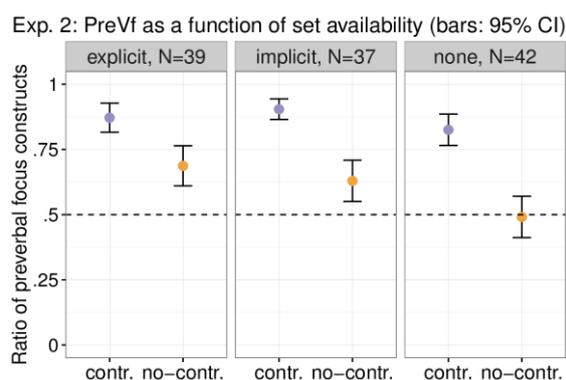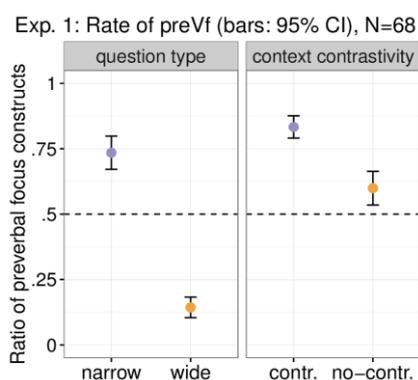
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