

On the configurationality of argument positions in Hungarian

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In the (non)configurationality debate concerning Hungarian in the 80s and 90s, Hungarian was shown to be characterized by an articulate and hierarchical preverbal domain, with distinct A-bar positions dedicated to discourse functions such as topic and focus. What this debate did not conclusively settle, however, is the question whether or not the structure of argument positions inside the predicate phrase is also configurational.

The most prevalent, and indeed empirically most well-argued and elaborated analysis that has emerged is that of É. Kiss' (1981, 1987a, b; 1991; 1994a, b; 2002; 2003), according to which the answer is negative: arguments are base-generated in the verb phrase in a free order in a flat structure. In É. Kiss (2008) this analysis is amended by the proposal that nonconfigurationality of the predicate phrase, instead of obtaining at the level of base structure, arises in the course of the syntactic derivation.

Drawing on a careful evaluation of data involving anaphor binding, Condition C, Weak Crossover, idioms, CED islands, Q-scope and others, the present talk offers an alternative approach, based on a hierarchical verb phrase (vacated by the raised verb) and a local scrambling movement that operates in the post-verbal domain of the clause. This local scrambling is of the Japanese–Korean type (e.g., Saito 2000), with no discernible discourse-semantic effects in terms of specificity. It is argued that the account based on Japanese-type scrambling movement makes available a better descriptive coverage by accurately accounting for a broad range of structural symmetries and asymmetries holding between the subject and the object argument.