Post-focal creaky voice? Prosodic disambiguation of syntactic ambiguities

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Hungarian is a so-called discourse-configurational language with fixed positions for topic (sentence-initial) and focus (immediately pre-verbal) (É. Kiss 1995). However, there are cases where syntactic ambiguities arise, when the typical syntactic focus marking either does not suffice to disambiguate between possible meanings or cannot be used at all (see, e.g., Langer & Kügler 2021, 2023).

In this study, I present preliminary results of a production experiment on the additive particle *is* ('also, too'). The particle *is* is focus sensitive (see, e.g., Krifka 2006, Beaver & Clark 2008, Balogh 2021, Balogh & Langer 2022), i.e., its scope depends on differences in focus marking. This is a challenge for syntactic focus marking, because syntax alone cannot disambiguate between these scopes. Additionally, the additive particle *is* cannot appear in the focus position, because it clashes with its exhaustive interpretation (É. Kiss 2002). It can appear pre- or post-verbal without a change in interpretation. This study tested the role of prosodic prominence marking in disambiguating these syntactic ambiguities.

In the study, participants produced sentences with three different scopes of *is* (narrow, VP and broad focus). The preliminary results show that Hungarian native speakers do use prosodic focus marking when syntax does not suffice. However, the results are not as clear as on the phrase level (Langer & Kügler 2021, 2023), because of the high amount of inter- and intra-speaker variation. The most striking result is the use of creaky voice. The results indicate that there are two strategies used by the participants. In one strategy, creaky voice is used as an 'extreme' version of post-focal deaccentuation, i.e., the presence and absence of creaky voice functions as a focus domain marker. In the other strategy, there are perceivable pitch differences inside the creaky voiced sentence parts that need further analysis.

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