

# Hungarian ‘focus position’ and English *it*-clefts: the semantic underspecification of ‘focus’ readings

Daniel Wedgwood, Gergely Pethő and Ronnie Cann  
University of Edinburgh

## Abstract

Analyses of the so-called ‘focus position’ of Hungarian have been influential in the development of discourse-semantic and syntactic theories, but have generally failed to consider contextualised, naturally-occurring data, despite the discourse-related nature of the phenomenon. We re-address the semantics of this position, using data drawn from the Hungarian National Corpus alongside arguments from introspective judgements. As part of this, we investigate the precise extent to which a commonly assumed parallelism between the Hungarian ‘focus position’ and the English *it*-cleft holds. The combined evidence calls into question conventional analyses, whereby a dedicated syntactic projection introduces a semantic operator that creates either an *exhaustive* or *identificational* (i.e. presuppositional) reading, and also contradicts any attempt to account for the supposed cross-linguistic parallel by providing a common underlying semantics for the ‘focus position’ and the *it*-cleft. We argue that, while an identificational analysis may suffice for the *it*-cleft, only a significantly underspecified semantics could capture the range of interpretations associated with the ‘focus position’; we suggest that a *predicative* analysis (É. Kiss 2004, 2005a; Wedgwood 2005, to appear) is of the right kind. In addition, the data indicate that at least some uses of this position are primarily motivated by the possibility of exploiting its prosodic character (Szendrői 2001, 2003). This also necessitates an underspecified semantic analysis.

## 1 Introduction

The Hungarian ‘focus position’ is one of the most well-known of ‘discourse configurational’ phenomena (i.e. syntactic phenomena that apparently convey discourse-related meanings) and as such has been of considerable importance in the wider development of approaches to syntactic analysis (see, for example, Rizzi 1997 and the papers in Abraham & de Meij 1986, É. Kiss 1995). However, considering its close connection to pragmatic and/or discourse semantic meaning, there is a remarkable lack of work analysing this phenomenon in the light of actual usage,

recorded in context. This paper aims to go some way towards filling this gap in the literature and thereby offer new some insights into the nature of the ‘focus position’, by comparing some of the principal existing claims about its interpretation with examples drawn from a large corpus of written Hungarian. At the same time, we do not eschew evidence from introspection; much of the first part of this article evaluates claims from the syntax-semantics literature ‘in their own terms’, in this sense, before we introduce our corpus-derived data to further illuminate the issues raised.

We argue that the combined evidence from introspective judgements and real usage falsifies the currently dominant analysis of this phenomenon, whereby the ‘focus position’ encodes an operator that provides either ‘exhaustive’ or ‘identificational’ semantics (as defined below). While each of these operator-based accounts successfully characterises semantic effects that are associated with a salient subset of the data, we provide numerous counterexamples to both. Instead, we argue, the ‘focus position’ must be significantly semantically underspecified, in order to account for a range of observable interpretive effects, some of which are not easily amenable to logical semantic analysis. The precise nature of this underspecification requires further research, but we suggest that the data support the development of two relatively unconventional lines of analysis from the existing literature: the ‘predicative position’ analysis suggested in unpublished work by É. Kiss (2003, 2004, 2005a) (and independently, from a quite different theoretical perspective, by Wedgwood 2005, to appear), alongside a prosodically-driven analysis, broadly as suggested by Szendrői (2001, 2003). We discuss how these modes of analysis can be viewed as being compatible with each other and with the need for an underspecified semantics.

In the course of discussing the Hungarian ‘focus position’ phenomenon, we pay particular attention to its supposed parallelism with the English *it*-cleft construction. Strong theoretical claims, as well as many more informal assumptions, have been made about this parallel, making it worthy of investigation in itself, as well as being an illuminating (and almost unavoidable) part of addressing the Hungarian data. The degree to which these two constructions resemble one another has been claimed to provide evidence for universally available features and/or semantic operators; we show that they also diverge in ways that rule out this analysis. Significantly, aspects of interpretation that are inevitably conveyed by the *it*-cleft construction are absent from the interpretation of the ‘focus position’ in some contexts. Therefore, though the two constructions do frequently produce parallel effects, the basis for deriving these must be different in each case. In the following section, we present the basic structural features of the ‘focus position’ construction and the nature of the real and claimed parallels with the English *it*-cleft<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>We use the term *construction* in a descriptive, theory-neutral way. Hungarian FP is usually thought of in terms of the contribution of a focus *position*; describing it as a construction facilitates comparison with the English *it*-cleft, and especially with Delin & Oberlander’s treatment of the latter. See section 1.1.

## 1.1 The ‘focus position’ and the *it*-cleft parallel

It is commonplace to use the *it*-cleft to provide a translation of example sentences containing the use of FP, in order to convey the discourse-related or information-structural facets of the interpretation of FP. Thus, minimal pairs like those in (1) are often produced.

- (1) a. János meghívta Mari-t.  
János VM-called Mari-ACC  
‘János invited Mari.’
- b. János MARI-t hívta meg.  
János Mari-ACC called VM  
‘It’s Mari who János invited.’

(1b) shows the essential features of the FP construction. The ‘focus position’ itself is immediately pre-verbal. Indeed, the requirement that the focus position be left-adjacent to the verb is so strict that even members of the class of so-called ‘verbal modifiers’, a diverse group of elements that themselves appear immediately before the verb in the unmarked case, cannot intervene between a ‘focused’ expression and the verb. In (1), the perfectivising/telicising verbal ‘prefix’ particle *meg* is a VM. The expression in the ‘focus position’ also carries a pitch accent, with the following verb (and typically all following material) de-accented, whereas in a so-called ‘neutral’ sentence like (1a) (i.e. a positive sentence with no FP), the VM+verb complex or, in the absence of a VM, the verb itself carries the most prominent pitch accent in the sentence.

The FP and *it*-cleft constructions resemble each other syntactically and semantically, insofar as the appearance of some constituent in a marked position relatively early in the sentence is associated with some form of assertion-presupposition interpretation (details of which are discussed below). The degree to which different analysts treat this as a strict parallelism of either structure or interpretation is often left unclear. For some, the resemblance to the *it*-cleft seems mostly a useful tool for describing the nature of FP, but others suggest that there are deeper connections between the constructions. The clearest example of the latter position is É. Kiss (1998, 1999), who argues for interpretive parallelism using a series of syntactico-semantic tests and attributes this to a common underlying grammatical mechanism, involving movement to a FocusP projection that is putatively part of Universal Grammar (some criticisms of É. Kiss’s particular claims of interpretive parallelism are put forward in section 3.1).

The degree of parallelism between FP and the *it*-cleft is thus both a theoretically significant issue in itself and a useful way to approach the investigation of the FP construction. This is especially so given that there is considerable descriptive work available on *it*-clefts, including a series of works by Delin (1989, 1992, 1995) and Delin & Oberlander (1995, 2005) that are based on the analysis of naturally-occurring, contextualised examples. One potentially revealing way to attack the analysis of the FP construction using our own corpus-derived examples is therefore

to take the major features of *it*-cleft interpretation, as identified by Delin & Oberlander, and to see whether these adequately describe the interpretation of FP. Given this, we may then ask whether anything that is common to the two constructions is plausibly attributable to their having a semantic operator in common.

Delin & Oberlander arrive at the following essential interpretive features for cleft constructions in English<sup>2</sup>:

- (2) a. Clefts convey uniqueness/exhaustive listing
- b. Clefts are presuppositional
- c. Presupposition and information structure are separate, but information-structural generalisations are possible (in particular, there are no all-new cleft sentences)
- d. Clefts are stativising constructions, as a consequence of the involvement of the copula as the main verb in the matrix clause

Point (2d), regarding the stative nature of cleft sentences, is an important and interesting matter, but will be left aside here, as it takes us into areas well beyond the scope of the present article (and the Hungarian FP construction does not feature a copula verb, in any case). The points in (2a–c), on the other hand, are directly relevant to our concerns. As outlined below, the most widely adopted analyses of Hungarian FP propose that it encodes either ‘exhaustive’ semantics or what has been termed ‘identificational’ semantics, involving a presuppositional reading of material outside the ‘focus position’.

While Delin & Oberlander list what are to them essential elements of the interpretation (in line with their broadly construction-based as opposed to derivational approach), proposals in the Hungarian literature tend to concentrate on syntactic structures that putatively feed the interpretation of the FP construction in a fully compositional fashion. Nevertheless, there is clearly room for comparison, on a descriptive level. In the sections 2–4, we discuss the interpretive features in (2a–c), both in relation to theoretical proposals from the literature on FP and in relation to the strength of comparisons between FP and the *it*-cleft. First, we briefly outline the nature of the naturally occurring Hungarian FP data that we draw on throughout the article.

## 1.2 The dataset

In this article, we aim (as far as constraints of space allow) to give a systematic critical overview of the principal existing accounts of the interpretation of the FP construction. Our methodology is

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<sup>2</sup>This list, taken from Delin & Oberlander (2005), is intended to cover all cleft constructions of English, not only *it*-clefts, but it suffices as a very broad summary of the points Delin & Oberlander make elsewhere about *it*-clefts specifically.

fairly catholic, as we believe it should be: in addition to our corpus-derived evidence we present both old and new evidence from introspective judgements and constructed examples and we also exploit comparisons with the English *it*-left construction (see section 1.1, below). However, in the context of the literature on Hungarian FP, it is clearly the use of corpus evidence that constitutes the most original part of our approach. In this section, we briefly outline the nature of our dataset and how it was created.

We used the Hungarian national corpus (Magyar Nemzeti Szövegtár)—a corpus of 153.7 million words of written Hungarian from diverse genres—which can be accessed through a web-based user interface, to extract examples that contain a filled focus position. In order to do this, we used well-known characteristics of the FP construction as search terms, such as the postposing of the verbal prefix in sentences containing a focus, and the fact that nouns with certain nominal cases directly preceding the finite verb are relatively frequently (parts of) foci. The search results thus gained were then manually processed. After discarding all obviously irrelevant sentences, the extracted examples were categorised (using complex criteria that we cannot describe in detail here for the lack of space) into several classes: FP proper, and other, arguably more or less related uses of an immediately pre-verbal position, such as examples containing so-called stress-avoiding verbs (a class of verbs that seem to require a certain argument to appear immediately pre-verbally, in a VM-like way) and others containing certain kinds of non-referential element (such as a bare noun) in the pre-verbal position, a phenomenon that is usually considered a form of complex predication and independent of the notion of focus in the literature on Hungarian<sup>3</sup>.

The resulting database contains approximately 1000 entries (translated and labelled Hungarian examples), about 500 of which were judged to involve a true focus. Note that the Hungarian FP construction appears very frequently; it is seemingly far more common than cleft constructions in English. Therefore, it would have been relatively easy to compile a collection of examples of this size manually. Nevertheless, we decided to use a computer corpus because this allowed us to obtain random examples from a wide range of text genres, in different styles, by different authors. This in turn allowed us to survey a broad range of uses of this construction, in sentences of different complexity that contained many different structures. In this way, we were able to avoid the bias (that is an inherent danger of purely introspective analysis) of concentrating exclusively on a subset of relevant data that is salient for some reason, for example because it involves simple structures or because it is similar to cases commonly discussed in the literature.

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<sup>3</sup>Note, however, that some older and some very recent accounts (É. Kiss 1987, 2004, 2005a, Wedgwood 2005, 2006) argue that there is just one immediately pre-verbal syntactic position involved in all of these phenomena, this being also the position of pre-verbal VMs. We do not analyse the syntax of FP as such in this article, but we discuss the basic semantic proposals of the aforementioned works in section 5.

## 2 ‘Topic Clause’ and ‘Comment Clause’ clefts

We return now to Delin & Oberlander’s list (2) of the characteristics of clefts, which will provide a framework for our discussion of the FP construction. Consider first points (2b) and (2c): the claims that clefts are presuppositional and that information structure and presupposition must be considered separately—or, as Delin (1995) puts it somewhat more precisely, the fact that presupposition and ‘shared knowledge’ are distinct in cleft constructions.

Delin & Oberlander repeatedly stress this point, countering a widespread tendency to associate the ‘clefted’ expression (i.e. the post-copula expression) in a cleft with the notion of focus (focus often being defined in terms of ‘new information’). When encountered out of the blue, clefts are indeed regularly read with the phonology and semantics of focus associated with the clefted expression (as in (3a)). But it is also quite normal to use a cleft construction such that the clefted expression is ‘given’ information and the subsequent relative clause is ‘new’ (as in (3b)) (both examples are naturally-occurring data originally reported in Prince 1978 and cited in Delin & Oberlander 1995).

- (3)      a.    It’s HERE I look like Mina Davis.  
          b.    The leaders of the militant homophile movement in America generally have been young people. It was they who fought back during a violent police raid on a Greenwich Village bar in 1969 . . .

Delin & Oberlander term the former kind ‘topic-clause’ (TC) clefts and the latter kind ‘comment-clause’ (CC) clefts. While the TC cleft implies that the material following the clefted expression is ‘known’ or ‘under discussion’ in some way, the structurally equivalent material in the CC example (3b) is entirely new (indeed, the clefted material is here no more than an anaphoric pronoun, so by definition relates to ‘known’ information). Since both kinds of cleft are common, this overturns the traditional idea that the *it*-cleft is primarily a focusing construction<sup>4</sup>.

Delin and Oberlander instead emphasise the role of presupposition in the interpretation of clefts. The idea, in brief, is that presuppositions indicate what the addressee is *required to include* in a model of the discourse in order to interpret the utterance at hand, whereas information status (as signalled by prosody and other indicators) indicates what the addressee is *assumed to have* in his or her discourse model. This distinction goes a good way to explaining numerous long-standing observations about clefts (such as Prince’s ‘known fact’ interpretation of clefts: “to mark a piece of information as fact, known to some people although not yet known to the intended hearer”; Prince 1978, 899).

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<sup>4</sup>Indeed, one of the most striking results of Delin’s (1989) corpus study of clefts is that CC *it*-clefts turn out to be more common in texts than the TC version, despite the TC being in effect the citation form of the *it*-cleft.

Our corpus-derived data confirm native speakers' intuitions that the Hungarian FP construction can also be used in ways equivalent to both TC and CC clefts. That is, in spite of the traditional terminology, the expression in the 'focus position' need not be new information nor need subsequent material be known/given information. An example from our database of the more well-known, TC-equivalent kind of FP sentence is given in (4a); meanwhile, (4b) is an example of the CC-equivalent kind<sup>5</sup>.

- (4) a. Cáfolta azt, hogy Torgyán Józse vagy bármely más politikus közbenjárt  
denied that-ACC that Torgyán József or any other politician influenced  
volna Szenes kinevezése érdekében: Szabó [szakmai  
SUBJUNCTIVE Szenes appointment-POSS3SG in.favour.of Szabó professional  
meggyőződésből] jelölte e posztra.  
conviction-out.of nominated this position-for  
'He denied that T. J. or any other politician had influenced the appointment of  
Szenes to her favour: she was appointed by Szabó to this position out of pro-  
fessional conviction [or: it was out of professional conviction that she had been  
appointed by Szabó to this position].'
- b. Mert a nemzet szellemiségét mindenkor a középiskolák  
because the nation spirit-POSS3SG-ACC always the secondary.schools  
alakították ki. Nem véletlen, hogy az elnyomó, enyhébben fogalmazva  
formed VM not coincidence that the repressive more.mildly formulated  
a szellemiséget kordában tartó hatalom mindig [a középiskolákra] tette  
the spirit-ACC controlling power always the secondary.schools-on put  
rá kezét.  
VM hand-POSS3SG-ACC  
'Because the spirit of the nation has always been developed by the secondary  
schools. It is no coincidence that the repressive powers, or to put it more mildly,  
the powers that keep the spirit in check have always taken control of [the sec-  
ondary schools]. (lit. put their hand on [the secondary schools])'

In (4a), the 'focus position' lives up to that name: the expression that appears there conveys new information. This takes on a sense of contrast, which may be attributed to the fact that the rest of the clause in which it appears is entirely 'given' due to parallel information discussed in the previous clause. In contrast to this, what appears in the 'focus position' in (4b) is an expression that has already appeared in the previous sentence, so that both the idea of secondary schools

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<sup>5</sup>In all of the corpus-derived examples used in this article, we use square brackets to pick out the expression that appears in the 'focus position'—i.e. the immediately pre-verbal position whose use is accompanied by the postposing of any VM—in both the original Hungarian and in the English translation. This is purely for expository reasons and should not be taken to indicate a commitment to any particular syntactic, prosodic or semantic analysis in any given case. In some examples we provide also surrounding sentences where they give important indications of the context; only the sentence containing the crucial use of FP is given an interlinear gloss.

and the very word *középiszkolák* are indisputably ‘given’ information. Meanwhile, the material outside of the focus position conveys contextually new information. In other words, (4a) and (4b) represent stark opposites in terms of how new and given information are distributed around the sentence, yet they both feature the use of the FP construction<sup>6</sup>.

In many ways, these results should not be seen as surprising, even perhaps to those who wish to maintain some idea of clefts and FP as being in some sense ‘focusing constructions’. The idea that concepts such as ‘given’ and ‘new’ have direct relevance for the grammars of natural languages has often been questioned, or rejected outright. Many formal analyses have assumed that any definition of linguistic notions like focus must be based in something else (whether more semantically underspecified, as in the ‘highlighting’ view of Bolinger or Breheny 1998, or considerably more specified, as in Rooth’s 1985, 1992 ‘alternative semantics’). Intuitively, speakers and addressees have little practical motivation to *signal* what is new or given information—after all, information that is genuinely ‘given’ is already known, by definition (and hence presumably known to be known).

The literature on the Hungarian FP construction has long noted that it seems to convey something other than mere newness, despite the retention of terminology like ‘focus position’. However, there are those, such as Szendrői (2001), who continue to treat newness as at least a working definition of the semantics of focus (see also Puskás 2000). In sections 3 and 4 we discuss the two most widely adopted attempts to capture the precise semantics of the ‘focus position’, which notably reflect two of Delin & Oberlander’s points in (2): exhaustive semantics and the involvement of presupposition.

If we were to transfer Delin & Oberlander’s reasoning directly to the FP construction, we might conclude at this stage that a presuppositional analysis would be appropriate for Hungarian FP as well as for the *it*-cleft; in section 4 we review more detailed arguments for the involvement of presuppositions in common interpretations of the former construction. However, we wish to emphasise from the beginning an important caveat of more general significance: identifying that a given semantic *effect* is associated with the use of some construction is not the same as identifying the basic, directly encoded semantics of that construction (or of some syntactic position within it). There may be a gap between linguistically encoded meaning and meaning conveyed, to be bridged by processes of inference. We return to this point in section 4.1.3, but it informs much of our discussion of existing analyses in the following sections.

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<sup>6</sup>While examples like (4b) unequivocally show that the FP construction *may* contain various arrangements of given and new information, it is notable that these CC-like examples are rare in our database, in contrast to Delin’s results for the *it*-cleft (see previous footnote. See section 5 below on possible explanations for this.

### 3 Exhaustivity

It remains a largely unchallenged descriptive generalisation that the expression found in the ‘focus position’ provides an ‘exhaustive listing’ of the items in a given context that have some property expressed by the rest of the sentence. Thus, for example, (1b) is naturally taken to communicate that Mari is the only person to have been invited by János (and this commonly leads to a contrastive reading, since Mari is thereby asserted to have a property that no potential alternatives to Mari have). This is apparently one of the facets of its interpretation that makes translation with an *it*-cleft appropriate in a case like this, in line with Delin & Oberlander’s descriptions.

This kind of interpretation seems to be quite regularly associated with sentences containing FP when these are presented to native speakers out of context. As a result, exhaustivity has been seen by many analysts as an essential feature of the interpretation of the construction; in many cases, it is taken to constitute *the* semantics of FP. Following Szabolcsi (1981), it has become one of the major analyses of the phenomenon to posit movement to a dedicated syntactic FocusP projection whose contribution at the syntax-semantics interface is an ‘exhaustivity operator’. Simplifying somewhat, such an operator would add something akin to the semantics of *only*, in a form such as (5)<sup>7</sup>:

$$(5) \quad \lambda x [\lambda P [P(x) \wedge \forall y [P(y) \rightarrow y = x]]]$$

The idea that many languages have special ways of expressing a specifically exhaustive or contrastive kind of focus is now widespread. Partly under the influence of work on Hungarian, in particular É. Kiss (1998), some linguists have adopted the generalisation (whether on a purely descriptive level or as a statement about Universal Grammar) that left-peripheral focus positions express exhaustive focus, while more ‘presentational’ kinds of focus are found in positions that are lower in a syntactic tree structure (see, for example, Rizzi 1997)<sup>8</sup>.

É. Kiss’s (1998) account rests upon the claim that human language makes use of (at least) two different notions of ‘focus’: what she calls ‘identificational focus’ (which really corresponds to exhaustively interpreted expressions; see section 4) and ‘information focus’ (which corresponds to more traditional notions of focus as newly introduced information). The sense in which these two notions are both species of some overarching category of focus is unclear—except that the term focus has (for better or worse) been used in connection with both at various points in the literature. By treating both as primitives of the grammar, É. Kiss (1998) gives no clear sense of an essential connection between them via a common, general concept of focus.

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<sup>7</sup>For differences between the exhaustive interpretation of FP and the interpretation of the lexical item *csak* ‘only’, see É. Kiss (2002, 89–97).

<sup>8</sup>Alongside Hungarian, typologically unrelated languages like Italian are sometimes cited as overtly using both of these positions. This remains highly controversial, however; see Samek-Lodovici (to appear).

Putting aside this issue, which is at least in part just terminological, it is worth taking a closer look at É. Kiss's (1998) claims. In addition to its wider theoretical influence, this work makes some of the clearest claims in the literature regarding both exhaustivity as the basic semantics of Hungarian FP and the parallelism that this suggests between FP and *it*-clefts<sup>9</sup>. É. Kiss describes a series of grammatical and semantic tests which purportedly demonstrate a strong structural and interpretive parallel between these two constructions. This is taken to show that these constructions both involve grammatical encoding of exhaustivity, in strict contradistinction to English focusing by pitch accent, which is said to express only information focus.

### 3.1 FP, *it*-cleft and exhaustivity

Of the putative *it*-cleft/FP parallelisms mentioned by É. Kiss (1998), perhaps the most clearly 'semantic' (i.e. based in truly semantic as opposed to arguably pragmatic mechanisms) is the incompatibility of these different constructions with certain quantifiers. It is often claimed that universal (and certain other) quantifiers cannot appear in FP or in the clefted part of an *it*-cleft. This is usually assumed to be attributable to some strictly semantic incompatibility, in the case of both constructions: for example, *every N* is assumed to be incompatible with the posited exhaustivity of the FP or clefted expression (and this is, in effect, É. Kiss's explanation). É. Kiss (1998, 252) provides the following example (presented here with her judgements):

- (6) \*Mari minden kalapot nézett ki magának.  
 Mari every hat.ACC looked out(VM) herself.DAT  
 \*'It was every hat that Mary picked for herself'

However, according to our combined intuitions and those of our informants, there is a significant difference in the nature of the incompatibility across the Hungarian and English cases. Contrary to É. Kiss's marking of outright ungrammaticality in (6), the use of clefted *every N* can be contextualised such that it becomes quite acceptable—in particular in corrective uses, which most naturally create a sense of contrast between the values of different quantifying determiners. But this is not the case with universal quantifiers in FP:

- (7) a. It's every child that got frightened, not just the girls.  
 b. \*Minden gyerek ijedt meg, nem csak a lányok.  
 every child got.scared VM not only the girls

One factor affecting the judgements in (6) is É. Kiss's use of the verb *pick out*. This strongly biases the context away from one in which a universal quantifier would be felicitous, because

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<sup>9</sup>This feeds into É. Kiss (1999), where a common underlying syntax for FP and *it*-clefts is made explicit, both constructions putatively making use of the same FocusP projection, made available by Universal Grammar.

things are always picked out from among a bigger set: if every item from the set of possibilities were selected, this would not be an act of ‘picking out’, but rather simply ‘taking’. As (7) shows, judgements regarding universals in the *it*-cleft are easily changed when other predicates are used, but not so with universals in FP.

Evidence like (7) suggests the possibility that while the two constructions show very similar interpretive effects on many levels, the origin of these effects may ultimately be different in each case. That is, the actual grammatically encoded semantics of the two constructions may be different, though they overlap in usage to such an extent that they come to have practically the same interpretations in many contexts<sup>10</sup>.

Other tests from É. Kiss (1998) are evaluated systematically by Green & Jaggard (2003). They find that the claimed parallelism between FP and the *it*-cleft construction, and the supposed concomitant contrast between the *it*-cleft and accent-based focus in English, regularly fail to appear in any clear and consistent way. In particular, it is often the case that accent-based focus can be used to express an exhaustive meaning (É. Kiss’s ‘identificational focus’ reading) in the contexts that É. Kiss uses to disambiguate this from information focus. Thus, any special parallel that might exist between FP and the cleft construction is not based in the expression of exhaustivity as such.

For example, É. Kiss argues that the following test (attributed to Donka Farkas) supports her position. (8b), which features an *it*-cleft, is given as the translation of (8a) and the use of *nem* and *no* is apparently parallel between the two: B seems to be contradicting the idea that Mary picked out *only* a hat. In contrast, English focus by pitch accent alone, as in (8c), seems not to allow this kind of contradiction of A’s statement using *no*. This is taken to demonstrate that FP and the *it*-cleft inherently convey exhaustive semantics in a way that focus by accent does not.

- (8)
- a. A: Mari EGY KALAPOT nézett ki magának.  
Mary a hat-ACC picked out herself-DAT  
B: Nem, egy kabátot is kinézett.  
No a coat-ACC also out-picked
  - b. A: It was A HAT that Mary picked for herself.  
B: No, she picked a coat, too.
  - c. A: Mary picked herself A HAT.  
B: #No, she picked a coat, too.

The situation is not so simple, however—especially once one considers the possible effects of context. First, we have found that the judgements given in (8) are far from universally accepted:

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<sup>10</sup>Wedgwood (to appear) argues that the encoded semantics of FP is essentially predicative, while the *it*-cleft is essentially identificational, a distinction which could be used to explain the contrast in (7). See also section 5 below. Wedgwood (2005, Chapter 5) discusses evidence specifically from quantification in favour of a predication-based analysis of FP.

speakers of both Hungarian and English fail to agree uniformly with the felicity of including *no* or *nem* in (8a,b). Second, B's use of *no* in (8c) can easily be contextualised such that it becomes perfectly acceptable. Wedgwood (to appear) provides the following examples, which intuitively involve the contradiction of an exhaustive meaning that is conveyed by purely accent-based focus in A's contribution:

- (9) a. C: I see that Jane picked herself a coat, a scarf and a pair of gloves.  
 A: Whereas Mary picked herself A HAT.  
 B: No, she picked a coat, too.
- b. C: Mary will look pretty stupid in that coat that she picked for herself.  
 A: Mary picked herself A HAT.  
 B: No, she picked a coat, too.

It is clear from the context-sensitivity displayed in the contrast between (8c) and (9) that *no* responses cannot be assumed to indicate the direct semantic encoding of the meaning that they appear to negate<sup>11</sup>. The question of whether exhaustivity is in fact encoded in FP and the *it*-cleft is thus left open by this supposed test, though the readings intuitively associated with (8c) and (9) show that a strictly exhaustive reading certainly can arise without direct grammatical encoding. Below, we provide evidence that (i) no one definition of exhaustivity could be common to the FP and *it*-cleft constructions and (ii) an assertion of exhaustivity as such cannot be directly encoded in either of them.

### 3.1.1 The markedness of non-exhaustive answers

For some authors (see in particular É. Kiss 1998, Horvath 2000), the syntactically-encoded 'exhaustivity operator' analysis is supported by data such as (10) (Horvath's (24b)), which seems to show that foci that are to be interpreted non-exhaustively are found post-verbally (hence *in situ*, on a 'focus-movement' analysis). This appears to support a neat picture whereby movement to a FocusP is driven by a feature [+exhaustive].

- (10) A: Kit hívtak meg?  
 'Who did they invite?'  
 B: Meghívták \*(például / többek között) Jánost.  
 VM-invited-3PL for.example / others among János-ACC  
 'They invited JÁNOS for example / among others.'

However, examples like (10) are at best of only marginal acceptability and, as Horvath's own example shows, require explicit markers of non-exhaustivity to be present (as in English, rising

<sup>11</sup>See also Geurts (1998), who argues against the use of similar data in discussions of scalar implicature.

intonation is also required, suggesting that the answer to A's question is 'incomplete'). Furthermore, as shown in section 3.1.2 below, similarly non-exhaustive foci can be found in the 'focus position' (contrary to all indications in the literature). The precise nature of the construction illustrated in (10) remains to be explained (for some relevant discussion, see Roberts 1998, Szendrői 2003, Wedgwood 2005), but the above-mentioned facts make quite clear that the non-exhaustivity displayed in this example is not simply the result of failing to move to an exhaustivity-creating FocusP<sup>12</sup>.

### 3.1.2 Non-exhaustive focus-sensitive expressions

New evidence against the exhaustivity operator analysis of FP comes from our corpus-derived data. One category of FP structure to emerge from our corpus search is that in which a focus-sensitive expression in the sentence is associated with the occupant of FP; that is, an expression whose interpretation is crucially a function of what is found in the 'focus position'. We do not attempt to offer an analysis of such expressions here, but note that Hungarian has a large number of them and that among these there are several with an inherently non-exhaustive meaning. For example, expressions in FP are commonly associated with adverbials like *jórészt* 'for the most part', *legkevésbé* 'least of all', *elsősorban* 'primarily', as exemplified in (11) and (12):

- (11) A Zöld Párt 1980-as megalakulása a legkevésbé [ökológiai problémákhoz]  
 the Green Party 1980-in formation-POSS3SG the least ecological problems-to  
 volt köthető — annak ellenére, hogy az atomerőművek s a  
 was connectable that.DAT notwithstanding that the atomic.power.plants and the  
 nukleáris átmeneti tárolók [...] ellen alakult polgári kezdeményezésekből [...]  
 nuclear transitory stores against formed civil initiatives-from  
 szerveződött párttá.  
 was.organised party-into  
 'The formation of the Green Party in 1980 had least to do [with ecological problems],  
 notwithstanding that it became a party out of civil initiatives against nuclear power  
 plants and nuclear intermediate storage sites.'

- (12) A kulturális bizottságban azonban elsősorban [szakmai szempontokból]  
 the cultural commission-in however primarily professional perspectives-from  
 vizsgálták ezt a kérdést, és kerestek politikai jellegű  
 examined-3PL this-ACC the question-ACC and sought.3PL political type

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<sup>12</sup>Wedgwood (2005) argues that 'narrow' foci—i.e. cases of what Lambrecht (1994) calls 'argument focus'—are unmarkedly interpreted as being exhaustive for purely pragmatic reasons (as a result, in effect, of what the Gricean literature would term 'Quantity-based' inference). This predicts that non-exhaustive narrow foci would require explicit signalling of their non-exhaustivity in any syntactic position, as seems to be the case in Hungarian.

kompromisszumot, politikailag felvetett vitás kérdésekben.  
 compromise-ACC politically raised disputed questions-in  
 ‘But in the cultural commission this question was mainly examined [from professional perspectives], and they were looking for a political compromise for the disputed questions that were raised by politics.’

Such examples contain an explicit statement to the effect that the thing named by the expression in FP is not the only thing of which the property described by the rest of the sentence holds—indeed, in (11), it is stated to be the least important thing to have this property. So these examples contain explicit statements of non-exhaustivity, in direct contradiction to the exhaustivity operator analysis of FP.

One might attempt to argue that such cases are nevertheless compatible with an exhaustivity-based analysis of FP, on the grounds that the crucial adverbs—‘primarily’, ‘mainly’, ‘least of all’, etc.—are themselves part of the complex property that is predicated of the FP expression. In this case, the FP expression does after all name the unique bearer of the property (e.g. only one thing can be ‘the least important’ or ‘main’ thing), and as such the use of FP could still be said to relate to exhaustive listing in these examples. While care is certainly required in identifying the precise property with respect to which some assertion is ‘exhaustive’, this argument fails to provide an adequate defence of the exhaustivity operator analysis of FP. According to this analysis, the semantic function of FP is to *add* semantic material to the translation of the sentence; an assertion that no other entity has the property in question is thereby made, much as in the case of adding an explicit marker of exhaustivity such as *only*. This is not part of the interpretation of examples like (11)–(12): we do not, surely, want to claim that the use of FP in these cases conveys meanings like ‘the only thing to be the least significant factor in the formation of the Green Party was . . .’ or ‘the question was mainly examined from professional perspectives only’. Such formulations at best fail to capture the intuitive meanings of the relevant sentences; at worst they are downright incoherent.

In any case, still more stark counterexamples to the exhaustivity operator analysis come from the use of the phrase *többek között* ‘among others’ in conjunction with the FP construction, numerous examples of which can be found in the Hungarian National Corpus. For example, (13) shows all the structural characteristics of the FP construction, yet the use of the phrase *többek között* makes it quite impossible for the ‘focus position’ expression to receive an exhaustive reading.

- (13) A küldöttségben Chris Patten, az unió külügyi biztosa mellett helyet  
 the delegation-in Chris Patten the union foreign commissioner-POSS3SG beside place  
 kap Javier Solana, akiket útjukra többek között [Anna Lindh svéd külügyminiszter]  
 gets Javier Solana whom way-on others among Anna Lindh Swedish foreign-minister  
 kísér majd el.  
 accompany FUTURE VM  
 ‘In the delegation, Javier Solana will be included in addition to Chris Patten, the for-

eign commissioner of the EU, and they will also be accompanied by among others [the Swedish foreign minister Anna Lindh].’

Note that there is no way to integrate ‘among others’ into the meaning of the property denoted by the rest of the sentence here: this would produce the incoherent meaning ‘Anna Lindh is the one person who among others accompanied Javier Solana and Chris Patten’. Nor would assuming *többek között* to be part of the expression in an exhaustive focus position be any more coherent, since the semantics this phrase and the application of an exhaustivity operator are simply incompatible<sup>13</sup>.

However one views the issue, then, the use of inherently non-exhaustive focus-sensitive adverbials in conjunction with FP shows the exhaustivity operator analysis of this construction to be unsustainable. Notably, example (12) does permit a felicitous *it*-cleft translation (*It was mainly from professional perspectives that the cultural commission examined this question*). Hence, again the FP and *it*-cleft constructions appear to share something semantically, but this cannot be an exhaustivity operator<sup>14</sup>.

Further evidence against the exhaustivity operator analysis comes from translating an example used by Horn (1981) to investigate the semantics of the *it*-cleft. Horn argues that the sentences that appear as the English translations in (14), below, demonstrate that exhaustivity is not part of the inherent semantics of the *it*-cleft. An exhaustive reading of *a pizza* would rescue (14a), as shown by (14b) (with its explicit encoding of exhaustivity, in the form of *only*). The fact that (14a) is incoherent is therefore assumed to show that the *it*-cleft construction encodes no such assertion of exhaustivity. As (14) shows, the same argument would apply directly to the Hungarian FP construction:

- (14) a. ??Azt tudtam, hogy Mari megevett egy pizzát, de most vettem  
That knew.1SG that Mari VM-ate.3SG a pizza-ACC but now take  
észre, hogy egy pizzát evett meg.  
mind-to(VM) that a pizza-ACC ate VM  
?? ‘I know Mary ate a pizza but I’ve just discovered that it was a pizza that she ate.’

---

<sup>13</sup>Note that the use of expressions like *többek között* in *non-FP* constructions, as in (10), has been taken to constitute evidence for the inherent non-exhaustivity of certain other syntactic positions (Szendrői 2001, 89) and, by extension, for the inherent association of FP with exhaustivity (e.g. Horvath 2000, 201). The evidence presented here clearly contradicts this idea: while non-exhaustive narrow foci do appear to require explicit marking such as *többek között*, this cuts across different syntactic positions.

<sup>14</sup>On the other hand, the ‘among others’ examples seem to demonstrate a difference between the constructions: one could not translate (13) with an *it*-cleft: *It is (#among others) the Swedish foreign minister who (#among others) will accompany the commissioner*.

- b. Azt tudtam, hogy Mari megevett egy pizzát, de most vettem  
 That knew.1SG that Mari VM-ate.3SG a pizza-ACC but now take  
 észre hogy csak egy pizzát evett meg.  
 mind-to(VM) that only a pizza-ACC ate VM  
 ‘I know Mary ate a pizza but I’ve just discovered that it was only a pizza that she  
 ate.’

One might object that Horn’s test does not rule out the possibility that exhaustive semantics is encoded in the two constructions, but rather shows that these constructions do not have merely the semantics of *only*. One could imagine, for example, that while *only* encodes exhaustivity, the *it*-cleft and FP encode both exhaustivity and some discourse-related meaning, such as *newly* asserting what is also exhaustively asserted. This would also explain the data in (14), since clearly the second conjunct in (14b) cannot assert as new information what has just been asserted in the first conjunct. Note, however, that even on this interpretation this evidence shows that an exhaustivity operator would be insufficient to characterise the contribution to meaning made by FP or the *it*-cleft. This being the case, an economical account might seek to derive the exhaustivity effect from whatever else might be required. And given the strong evidence presented above against the idea that exhaustivity is inherent to the interpretation of these constructions, this would appear to be not only a desirable form of analysis, but a necessary one.

The evidence in this section constitutes a convincing case against the encoding of exhaustivity as an operator in the manner of (5), such that the use of FP or an *it*-cleft makes an exhaustive assertion. However, it does not rule out every way of treating exhaustivity or uniqueness as an inherent part of the meaning of these constructions. The second major kind of ‘semantic operator’ analysis introduces this not as part of the asserted meaning, but as a presupposition. It is this analysis that we consider in the next section.

## 4 Presupposition and identification

While the term ‘exhaustive focus’ continues to be used in parts of the literature on FP, there is another mode of analysis in which FP encodes a different kind of semantic operator, an *identificational* operator<sup>15</sup>. Szabolcsi (1994, 181), drawing closely on Kenesei (1986), defines this operator as follows<sup>16</sup>:

<sup>15</sup>While some parts of the literature clearly treat these as distinct analyses, the difference between an exhaustivity-based approach and an identificational one is elsewhere often obscured. For example, É. Kiss (1998, 245) uses the term ‘identificational focus’ but offers only an informal statement of the semantics of this, and this seems much closer to describing an exhaustivity operator than an identificational one, in the sense used here.

<sup>16</sup>Note that the most embedded part of this formula is in effect the same as the exhaustivity operator in (5), but bound by the iota operator to effect the crucial shift from assertion to presupposition. One potential distraction is the subset relation, which is included by Szabolcsi (1994) merely to ensure that certain intuitively necessary entailments

$$(15) \quad \lambda z \lambda P [z = \iota x [P(x) \ \& \ \forall y [P(y) \rightarrow y \subseteq x]]]$$

This use of the iota operator shows that the uniqueness of some entity with certain properties (those denoted by the ‘focus frame’ part of the sentence) must be presupposed (and its existence therefore implied also)<sup>17</sup>. The only *assertion* made by the use of FP is then that this entity is identified as being the item named in FP. In other words, the use of FP, on this analysis, is more or less equivalent to the use of a sentence of the form ‘The  $x$  that  $P$ s is  $y$ ’. For example, the interpretation of (16) involves first the presupposition that there is a unique entity (in context, presumably a unique person) whom Mari loves. Given this, the sentence asserts that this person is János.

- (16) Mari JÁNOST szereti.  
 Mari János-ACC loves  
 ‘It’s János that Mari loves.’

On this presuppositional identificational analysis, the sense of exclusion of potential alternatives—in other words, the very exhaustivity that is asserted through the use of FP on the previous analysis—is derived from the presupposition of uniqueness. By this shift in perspective, the identificational analysis avoids some of the problems of the exhaustive approach. For example, if the only assertion made by the use of FP is an act of identification, one would not expect it to rescue the example in (14a) in the way that *csak* does in (14b) (indeed, the preceding clause makes it clear that no identification of ‘the thing Mary ate’ is required, so the infelicity of (14a) is predicted). Similarly, one might argue that the examples in (11)–(12) are also fully compatible with an identificational analysis: it is presupposed that some particular thing is the main/primary/least significant bearer of some property and the expression in FP identifies what this is.

However, the identificational operator fares no better than the exhaustivity operator when it comes to examples like (13), our examples with *többek között* ‘among others’. One of the principal claims made for the identificational operator is, in effect, that it succeeds in making exhaustivity an inherent part of the semantics of FP while avoiding the problems of claiming that FP *asserts* exhaustivity. But the acceptability of examples like (13) shows quite simply that an exhaustive reading cannot be inherent to FP in any way, whether as assertion or presupposition. In other words, the apparent successes of the identificational operator depend upon the act of identification being strictly with a unique, maximal individual. It would be simply incoherent to ‘identify’ such an individual with a list modified by ‘among others’. Thus, as mentioned in

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are not ruled out; for example, *Mari JÁNOST ÉS KATIT hívta meg* ‘It’s János and Kati that Mari invited’ must not be rendered incompatible with the propositions ‘Mari invited János’ and ‘Mari invited Kati’.

<sup>17</sup>Note that the iota operator is usually defined to bind only type  $e$  expressions, while recognised exhaustive/identificational uses of the ‘focus position’ can involve a wide variety of linguistic expressions. Though this is somewhat orthogonal to our concerns, it is a significant issue that any serious identificational operator account would have to address.

section 3.1.2, it would clearly make no sense to claim that the meaning of (13) is ‘Anna Lindh is *the one person who among others* accompanied Javier Solana and Chris Patten’.

We have therefore already seen strong counter-evidence to the identificational operator analysis. Below, in sections 4.1 onwards, we give further reasons to reject this and any other semantic operator analysis. However, the identificational operator does bring up some important issues that merit further discussion at this point. While we hold that they cannot be directly encoded in the FP construction, presupposition and identification do constitute crucial elements of its interpretation and are also crucial to any comparison with the interpretation of *it*-clefts.

The fact that the identificational analysis is based on a presupposition of uniqueness with respect to some predicate provides a close connection to the analysis of the English *it*-cleft construction in the work of Delin & Oberlander. As (2a and b) from section 1.1 make clear, Delin & Oberlander take both uniqueness/exhaustivity and presuppositionality to be key characteristics of the meanings conveyed by *it*-clefts. Putting these two ideas together, we have something that is at least descriptively very similar to the identificational analysis of Hungarian FP (though the nature of Delin & Oberlander’s construction-based analysis is somewhat different in principle to the fully compositional approach that underlies the use of semantic operators).

The temptation, then, might be to view this notion of identification as a means by which to unify the underlying interpretation (and possibly structure) of the two constructions (perhaps in roughly the manner suggested by É. Kiss 1998, 1999). There are certainly interesting parallels to be drawn in the matter of presuppositionality. Rooth (1999) uses examples like the following to show that *it*-clefts are presuppositional in a way that focusing by pitch accent alone (here indicated by [ ]<sub>F</sub>) is not:

- (17)
- a. A: Did anyone win the departmental football pool this week?
  - b. B: Probably not, because it’s unlikely that [Mary]<sub>F</sub> won it, and she’s the only person who ever wins.
  - c. B: #Probably not, because it’s unlikely that it’s Mary who won it, and she’s the only person who ever wins.

The point here is that the *it*-cleft in (17c) conveys a presupposition that someone won the football pool and this is what creates a sense of incoherence in this example, since it contradicts the explicit statement that ‘probably no-one won’. Parallel examples such as (18) show that the same kind of incoherence is created with Hungarian FP, supporting the idea that it conveys the same kind of presupposition:

- (18) a. #Kétlem, hogy bárki is elolvasta volna a Háború és Békét, ugyanis  
 doubt.1SG that anyone even VM.read would.have the *War and Peace* since  
 nem valószínű, hogy Mari olvasta volna el, és biztosan tudom, hogy  
 not probable that Mari read would.have VM and certainly know.1SG that  
 rajta kívül senki nem olvasta el.  
 otherwise no-one not read VM  
 ‘I doubt that anyone has read *War and Peace*, because it’s unlikely that Mari  
 would have read it, and I know for sure that nobody else has read it.’
- b. #I doubt that anyone has read *War and Peace*, because it’s unlikely that it’s Mari  
 who read it, and I know for sure that nobody else has read it.

As the English translation in (18a) shows, there is nothing inherently strange about the situation described in this example; the unacceptability of the Hungarian version therefore presumably stems from the use of the FP construction—and, as (18b) shows, this seems to be quite parallel to the case of (17). On face value, this evidence also appears to support the view advanced by É. Kiss (1998, 1999) that the English *it*-cleft and Hungarian FP share essentially the same semantics, in contradistinction to purely prosodic focusing in English<sup>18</sup>. It also appears to constitute evidence (contrary to our position) for the idea that FP directly encodes a presupposition of existence, in the manner of the identificational operator analysis.

However, below we present strong evidence that the *it*-cleft is in fact more inherently presuppositional than FP. This must lead to two important conclusions: first, the identificational operator analysis cannot be the correct analysis of FP; second, the semantics of the *it*-cleft and FP must be different: they cannot be treated as manifestations of *any* common semantic operator.

#### 4.1 Non-presuppositional FP and the breakdown of the FP/cleft parallel

First, let us outline the overall picture that we believe emerges from the data presented in this section and in section 5. While it is clear that both FP and the *it*-cleft frequently convey a presuppositional identificational reading, this cannot be the core, inherent semantics of the Hungarian construction, since FP also occurs with non-presuppositional readings. Furthermore, there are classes of sentences involving FP that do not necessarily produce a presuppositional reading, and these cannot be translated with an *it*-cleft without introducing a presuppositional reading. Hence, we draw the conclusion that a presuppositional identificational reading is indeed inherently associated with the *it*-cleft construction, but must arise only indirectly in the case of FP. As such, the semantic operator analysis of FP cannot be correct—and certainly there can be no straightforwardly parallel analysis of the two constructions whereby they manifest a common semantic operator.

<sup>18</sup>Besides the evidence presented below, this view is called into question by Geurts & van der Sandt’s (2004a, 2004b) arguments that purely prosodic focus also introduces a presupposition, the *it*-cleft simply imposing different conditions on the *accommodation* of this presupposition, owing to certain details of the form of the construction.

We reserve some of our examples of the failure of FP to show a presuppositional reading until section 5. In the remainder of the present section, we concentrate on two particular sources of pertinent examples: the ‘clefting’ or ‘focusing’ of adverbials and the non-presuppositional use of FP in subordinate clauses.

#### 4.1.1 ‘Clefted’ versus ‘FP-focused’ adverbials

(19), part of a newspaper editorial, is another example drawn from our corpus-derived database.

(19) A mögöttünk hagyott 10 évszázadban többször kellett új épületet emelnünk a Szent István-i alapokra.

‘In the past 10 centuries, we have had to put up a new building several times on the foundations that had been laid by St. Stephen.’

Így volt ez tíz évvel ezelőtt is, amikor [közös elhatározásból] indultunk  
so was this ten year-with before.this also when common will-from left  
el a nagy változtatás útján.

VM the great change-with road-POSS3SG-on

‘Such was the case ten years ago, too, when we set out on the road of great changes [by our common will].’

Olyan Magyarország jelent meg álmainkban, olyan Magyarorszáért küzdünk, amelyben mindenki számára megnyílik a szabadság és a jólét, a tisztességes polgári élet lehetősége.

‘The Hungary that appeared in our dreams and that we are fighting for, in which there will be a chance for freedom, wealth, and respectable civil life given for everyone.’

The expression that is syntactically in the ‘focus position’, *közös elhatározásból* ‘by our common will’ (lit. common will-from), does not receive an exhaustive reading of ‘by our common will’: this adverbial need not be read in contrast to some other salient ‘way in which things occurred’, nor in opposition to the notion that there could have been more than one way in which things occurred. Nor does it appear to convey the presuppositional meaning predicted by the identificational operator analysis. Indeed, the reading associated with either of the semantic operator accounts reviewed above would contradict the rhetorical structure of the discourse rather starkly. The writer is clearly concentrating on the historical significance of ‘setting out on the road of great changes’ and constructs a narrative progression from the distant past, through the recent past and present, into the future, in the course of the three sentences presented in (19). This progression would be abruptly interrupted and the thrust of the text altered significantly were the adverbial ‘by our common will’ signalled to be a contrastive focus or to be the only asserted material amid a lengthy description of presupposed material. It is intuitively plain that the main point of the sentence is not to identify some presupposed manner of the ‘setting out’ referred to; rather, the ‘setting out’ is being newly asserted to play a certain part in the writer’s historical narrative.

Tellingly, the effect is quite different if this example is translated into English using an *it*-cleft, as in (20a). Here, the only possible reading is contrastive/exhaustive (specifically, the most likely reading is a correction or contradiction of a previous speaker—a common use of both FP and *it*-clefts in other contexts). This effect could be analysed as following from a presuppositional identificational reading: if the adverbial identifies *the* way in which ‘the setting out’ occurred, the relevance of this may be naturally established by assuming an implicit contrast with some other manner. This would indeed sit very awkwardly in the context of the surrounding text. At the very least, one would expect the following text to expand on the idea that what happened was ‘by our common will’, due to the ‘foregrounding’ effect of a contrastive/identificational construction, but this is not how the text continues.

In contrast, a much more appropriate translation, to our minds, would be (20b), which introduces the adverbial in question as a parenthetical. It seems clear from this that this adverbial is more felicitously treated as a piece of background information, contrary to either form of semantic operator analysis. This implies the incidental *addition* of a piece of information, not establishing the identity of something presupposed—and certainly not the special manipulation of syntactic structure in order to do this.

- (20)
- a. Such was the case ten years ago, too, when it was by our common will that we set out on the road of great changes.
  - b. Such was the case ten years ago, too, when, by our common will, we set out on the road of great changes.

It seems, then, that (20a) fails to capture the meaning of the Hungarian sentence precisely because the *it*-cleft necessarily introduces a presuppositional kind of identificational reading—and this of course must mean that the FP construction does not. Since this example also provides further evidence that FP is not necessarily contrastive or exhaustive, it looks like the chances of accounting for the interpretive effects of FP by encoding them directly in any form of semantic operator are slim—and there is seemingly no chance of formulating an operator that is common to FP and the *it*-cleft.

(21) is an example from another register of written Hungarian (an internet discussion board) and with a different kind of adverbial phrase (bearing an Instrument role) in the immediately pre-verbal position:

- (21) Igaz, menetlevelet kell vezetni, de ez enyhe büntetés a dízel ÁFÁ-jának visszaigénylési lehetősége fejében.  
 Yes, you have to write a waybill, but this is a small price to pay for being able to claim the VAT on diesel back.  
 Az én autóm 10 hónapos korában [Ausztriában élő rokonság segítségével]  
 the my car-ACC 10 month-with age-in Austria-in living relatives help-POSS-with

szereztük be, s mindösszesen kb. 2,5 millióba került, amiből – lévén  
 got.1PL VM and in.all about 2.5 million-in cost which-from it.being  
 teherautó – az ÁFA visszajött.  
 van the VAT back-came  
 ‘We got my car when it was 10 months old [with the help of relatives who live in Aus-  
 tria], and it cost 2.5 million in total, of which—it being a van—the VAT was refunded.’

The rhetorical structure of this example makes it particularly clear that a presupposition-assertion structure of the kind embodied in the identification operator analysis of FP would be inappropriate. The identificational analysis would require an interpretation whereby there is a presupposition that the writer’s car was obtained in a certain ways (or perhaps: with a certain form of help) and that this way is identified as being ‘with the help of relatives in Austria’. But this interpretation does not fit coherently into either the immediate context, in which the speaker’s evident concern is to pass on information about VAT rebates for vans, or the wider text, which is a general discussion about buying cars (covering issues such as price, fuel consumption, which makes are likely to get stolen, etc.)—no other participant in the discussion mentions the way they got their car, or that anyone helped them buy their car.

This example is interesting in that there is a structural (and presumably at some level semantic) motivation for the use of the ‘focus position’, yet the identificational operator analysis still fails to predict which expression will occupy this position, or the reading that is produced. The reason for the use of FP is that this example involves a ‘contrastive topic’, as is clear from the explicit use of the first person singular pronoun *én*, which implies a reading comparable to the English *As for MY car . . .*. It is an established observation that contrastive topics require the subsequent appearance of what Gyuris (2002) terms an ‘associate’, which is typically a focused expression in the immediately pre-verbal position (though expressions in the non-VM-inverting ‘Quantifier position’ as well as stress-bearing verbs on a ‘verum focus’ reading may also play this role<sup>19</sup>). Therefore, in some sense there is an independent motivation for the use of the FP construction in (21) (the precise nature of which is beyond the scope of the present article)—and by the same token we have good reason to view this as an example of the FP construction, rather than any possible confounding look-alike (for which we would lack independent evidence in any case). However, this does nothing to rescue the identificational operator analysis of FP. If some syntactic position contributes a semantic operator, the relevant reading should arise whenever this position is employed, and this should reflect the choice of expression that appears there. As we have noted, this is not the case in (21).

Once again, intuitions about the interpretation of the example are reflected in the infelicity of translating it into English using an *it*-cleft. Clefting the adverbial ‘with the help of relatives who live in Austria’ could only result in a contrastive reading of this phrase or of some sub-part of it

<sup>19</sup>The fact that a contrastive topic’s need for an ‘associate’ may thus be fulfilled by certain stress-bearing expressions outside of the recognised ‘focus position’ could be taken as evidence in favour of a partly prosodic analysis of the FP construction; see section 5

(except in certain contexts quite unlike (21), which would license a ‘comment-clause’ reading of the cleft, as defined in section 2).

#### 4.1.2 Subordinate clauses and ‘default questions’

There are numerous examples in our database of apparent FP structures within subordinate clauses which fail to show exactly the readings predicted by semantic operator analyses of the construction. We briefly illustrate such examples in this section; for further discussion, see Pethő et al. (in prep.). While some of these examples suggest a certain degree of connection to the notion of presupposition, they do not produce the kind of presuppositional reading predicted by the identificational operator analysis, nor do they parallel the reading that an equivalent *it*-cleft sentence would have.

Consider first (22). The identificational operator analysis suggests that the first sentence in this example identifies a presupposed ‘time and place of disappearance’.

- (22) Élnek azok a francia barlangászok, akik [tíz nappal ezelőtt a  
live those the French cave-explorers who ten days-with ago the  
délnyugat-franciaországi esőzések idején] tűntek el. Gramat környékén a  
south-west-France-in rainfalls during disappeared VM Gramat around the  
mentők találták meg őket.  
rescuers found VM them  
‘The French cave explorers who disappeared [ten days ago during the rainfalls in  
Southwest France], are alive. They were found by rescuers around Gramat.’

Intuitively, there is no such presupposition and as such the operator analysis fails. However, there is arguably some connection to the idea of presupposed information here, at least in a broad sense of the term ‘presupposition’. Given the information that someone has disappeared, *When?* and *Where?* are frequently natural questions to ask—if a disappearance is relevant to the addressee, then the circumstances under which it occurred are also likely to be of some consequence. In some sense, then, the material in the ‘focus position’ here answers a question that would be expected given the rest of the subordinate clause. This is not identical to the way in which a truly presuppositional reading (such as that associated with *it*-clefts) seems to answer an implicit question, just because the remaining subordinate clause material (in this case ‘who disappeared’) is not presupposed material. Rather, it constitutes an assertion that could be said to lead to certain related questions.

A straightforward *it*-cleft translation—such as *#The French cave explorers who it was ten days ago during the rainfalls in Southwest France that they disappeared*—is certainly not possible here. Though there are plausibly also independent structural problems at work in this case, it

is intuitively plain that the interpretation of any *it*-cleft, specifically its presuppositional nature, would be problematic in itself. The restrictive relative clause here functions to help identify *The French cave explorers*; it would consequently be quite incoherent to use the FP construction within this clause, were its semantic contribution to impose an assertion of the identification of some other, presupposed entity. Thus, again, we have a case where the *it*-cleft construction does appear necessarily to bring about a presuppositional identificational reading, but felicitous use of the FP construction does not. Hence, no identificational operator is being triggered in this use of the Hungarian construction, nor can the two constructions share common semantics.

Another apparent case of ‘default question’ answering, which is nevertheless still further away from being plausibly viewed as involving ‘identificational’ presuppositions, is found in (23)<sup>20</sup>:

- (23) Köztudomású volt, hogy a divattervező igen tevékenyen vett részt a miami  
 widely-known was that the fashion-designer quite actively took part the Miami  
 homoszexuálisok életében, de nem is sejthető, hogy ismerte  
 homosexuals life-POSS3SG-in, but not even could.be.suspected that knew  
 -e Cunanant, akire azért terelődött a gyanú, mert megtalálták  
 whether Cunanan-acc whom-on that-why was-guided the suspicion because found-3SG  
 egy garázsban azt a kis teherautót, amelyet feltehetően [utolsó  
 a garage-in that the small van, which-acc probably last  
 áldozatától] lopott el.  
 victim-POSS3SG-from stole VM  
 ‘It was widely known that the fashion designer did take a rather active part in the life  
 of homosexuals in Miami, but it is completely unknown whether he could have known  
 Cunanan, who fell under suspicion because the small van which he had probably stolen  
 [from his last victim] was found in a garage.’

The presuppositional operator analysis of FP predicts a clearly incoherent reading of the final clause here, in the context of the whole sentence. To make a point of introducing ‘the person from which the van was stolen’ as a presupposition would be in complete contradiction to the thrust of the discourse: this detail is surely no more presupposed than the small van itself or the event of finding it—certainly there is no reason to believe that the van was stolen until this is asserted within the relative clause. Accordingly (though perhaps also for other reasons), an *it*-cleft translation would be entirely infelicitous. Within the relative clause, however, there is a particular relationship between the verb ‘*ellopott* ‘stole’ and the expression in the pre-verbal position. Once again, the best way to describe this relationship seems to be in terms of the way the pre-verbal material answers a ‘default question’.

Note that there is no strictly semantic definition of this relationship that on its own predicts the use of FP. Source arguments in general, and the Source argument of *ellop* ‘steal’ in particular, are

<sup>20</sup>For readability, we have changed one detail in this example—*ezért* to *azért*—which we take to be a simple typographical error in the original.

not obligatorily found in the pre-verbal position (thus *ellop* is not a ‘stress-avoiding verb’ with respect to this argument): in other contexts, a parallel use of this position is usually felt to confer a ‘contrastive focus’ reading, just as with other expressions:

- (24) a. Cunanan ellopott egy teherautót az áldozatától.  
Cunanan VM-stole a van-ACC the victim-POSS3SG-from  
‘Cunanan stole a van from his victim.’
- b. Cunanan az áldozatától lopott el egy teherautót.  
Cunanan the victim-POSS3SG-from stole VM a van-ACC  
‘It’s from his victim that Cunanan stole a van.’

Hence, as in (22), we appear here to have an assertion made within a relative clause, within which some relatively stereotypical piece of information (given the nature of the assertion) is placed with in the immediately pre-verbal position. Nevertheless, there is no strict syntactic requirement for this word order to appear in relative clauses (they are not, for example, obligatorily word final as in German), nor is there any other reason to believe that the examples in this section involve anything other than the FP construction.

Such examples, and their relationship to cases of real presupposition, are worthy of further study. For present purposes, it suffices to note that they cannot be adequately dealt with by assuming that the mechanical application of a semantic operator is the result of the use of the FP construction.

### 4.1.3 Implications for analysis: direct and indirect encoding

To encapsulate the above discussion, we have seen that very similar presuppositional effects can be associated with the two constructions in question, yet we have also seen that one of them (FP) can be dissociated from the relevant presuppositional reading, while the other (the *it*-cleft) seemingly cannot. In this case, it cannot be that the former involves the direct encoding of a presuppositional ‘identificational operator’—instead, the presupposition must in this case regularly emerge from some other source.

This requires an important change in analytical perspective. Neither Szabolcsi’s (1994) identificational operator nor Delin & Oberlander’s construction-level descriptions suggest any derivation of the crucial presuppositional meaning: its seemingly intrinsic association with the each construction is stipulated in both cases. However, since the evidence presented above shows that the presupposition in question cannot in itself be the inherent semantics of FP, it must be derived in some way. In other words, the basic semantics of FP must be underspecified in such a way that this presuppositional reading is triggered in certain (linguistic and/or extra-linguistic) contexts, via processes of inference. Rather than simply characterising the apparent semantic effects of the use FP, the analyst’s job becomes the more complicated one of differentiating the encoded

meaning from the inferred meaning and identifying the processes by which the one may lead to the other.

Note also that the task of analysing the FP construction has, in principle, two distinct parts, which need not necessarily come together as closely as they do in the conventional syntactico-semantic mode of analysis. On the one hand, there is the question of the immediate motivation for the appearance of a given expression in the immediately pre-verbal position; on the other is the question of how and why such expressions receive their observed interpretations once in this position. Conventional syntactic analysis regularly sees these two issues as merely two sides of the same coin—as in the assumption that movement to some syntactic position is motivated by the need to check some ‘uninterpretable’ (but ultimately semantically-based) feature. However, the relationship between interpretation and motivations for word ordering may be somewhat less direct than this. We find it quite plausible that there could be multiple underlying motivations for the appearance of different expressions in this position, even while maintaining the assumption that it has consistent (if underspecified) encoded semantics.

Below, we argue that at least one important motivation for appearance in the immediately pre-verbal position is essentially prosodic, rather than strictly syntactico-semantic; a possibility already raised by Szendrői (2001, 2003). The basic idea is that some expressions may be placed immediately pre-verbally for the sake of taking on the pitch accent that is associated with the position of the verb in Hungarian. Certain interpretive effects may be associated with this in turn, but this is in principle quite different to the direct association of a syntactic position with a fixed semantic interpretation. Unlike Szendrői, we do not assume that alignment with this pitch accent is inherently related to the notion of focus (or to any other particular semantic/pragmatic notion), hence this prosodic motivation for pre-verbal appearance is quite compatible with an underspecified semantic analysis. We return to this issue in section 5.

As for the interpretive side of the analysis itself, we discuss below what we believe to be a promising line of analysis: the idea that FP encodes a certain kind of predicative procedure, as argued from distinct theoretical backgrounds by É. Kiss (2003, 2004, 2005*a*) and Wedgwood (2005, to appear). While it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a fully formulated analysis, we discuss below how the ‘predicative’ approach is consistent both with important aspects of our data and with some general suggestions of Delin & Oberlander (2005) regarding how constructions like clefts and FP may convey a variety of meanings.

## **5 Underspecification and prosody**

We have already provided evidence for the need to posit semantic underspecification of some kind in the encoded meaning of the FP construction. Below, we exemplify some data that point to the need to consider prosody as a motivation for the use of the ‘focus position’. Here we outline the kinds of semantic/pragmatic and prosodic approaches that might be used, in combination, to

account for such data.

As noted above, the evidence so far demands an interpretive analysis that is underspecified in the following particular way: the presuppositional, identificational reading of FP should be predicted to arise in many contexts, but as the result of inferences drawn over some other kind of meaning, not from direct linguistic encoding of the presupposition. There are proposals in recent literature that seek to meet this description. Though from somewhat different theoretical perspectives, both É. Kiss, in recent (partly unpublished) work (2003, 2004, 2005*a*), and Wedgwood (2005, to appear) propose that the so-called ‘focus position’ should be thought of as a predicative position, such that the expression found there is interpreted as a predicate, taking subsequent material to constitute a term over which it predicates. When an expression like a simple noun phrase is required to fulfil this predicative role, it can only do so by acting as, in É. Kiss’s (2004) terminology, a ‘specificational predicate’. This in effect amounts to predicating *the property of being the denotation of that noun phrase* of a term constructed from the denotation of the rest of the sentence. For example, in (1b) the thing invited by János has ‘the property of being Mari’. As this description suggests, the result of this is essentially the very presuppositional reading encapsulated in the identificational operator analysis: predicating ‘being Mari’ is of course essentially the same as identifying something with Mari, and an act of identification in itself presupposes the existence of a particular thing that is being identified<sup>21</sup>. But, crucially, this does not result from the stipulatory strategy of positing an operator that encapsulates the reading in question. Instead it emerges from an underspecified, procedural meaning, thus leaving open the possibility that this reading may fail to arise in some contexts, in line with our evidence regarding the full range of uses of FP.

Wedgwood (to appear) goes on to argue that the fundamental difference between the *it*-cleft and FP constructions is that the former does actually encode a presuppositional identificational meaning, compositionally (as is apparent in the explicit involvement of the copula), whereas Hungarian FP encodes a predicative procedure, as described above—and thereby regularly comes to express an identificational meaning, but only indirectly. The findings of the present article broadly support this position, most obviously in the general pattern reported in the previous section, whereby the presuppositional reading unavoidably re-surfaces when non-presuppositional uses of FP are translated using an *it*-cleft. Consider also two details mentioned along the way. First, there is the fact that the *it*-cleft seems to appear much more readily with a ‘comment clause’ reading. In line with Delin & Oberlander, we may view the encoding of an identificational presupposition to be orthogonal to the expression of information status. At the same time we may recognise the long-held view (going back at least as far as Paul 1880, Wegener 1885, as cited in Rooth 1996) that there is some form of conceptual parallel between the distinctions ‘subject-predicate’ and ‘topic-focus’ (though not a necessary a parallel that survives in every context, it would seem). A predication-based FP would then be predicted to show the ‘topic-clause’ information structure most of the time, unlike an identificational *it*-cleft. Second, this account predicts

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<sup>21</sup>This could of course be conceptualised as type-shifting: note that Partee’s (1987) operation for shifting from  $\langle e \rangle$  to  $\langle e, t \rangle$  is *ident*, which (like her *BE* operation for lowering from  $\langle (e, t), t \rangle$  to  $\langle e, t \rangle$ ) introduces a statement of identity, thus:  $ident(mari'_{\langle e \rangle}) : \lambda x [x = mari']$

the fact (mentioned in footnote 14, section 3.1.2) that ‘among others’ seems able to co-occur with FP but not with an *it*-cleft. The identificational analysis of the *it*-cleft involves a necessary presupposition of uniqueness, which is plainly incompatible with an assertion of ‘among others’, whereas the predicational analysis of FP does not impose any such meaning directly, even if it does regularly lead to a closely comparable reading via inferential processes.

There are also quite independent reasons to believe that the predicative analysis is on the right track. As argued in detail in Wedgwood (2005, Chapter 5), the distribution of quantifiers across the different linearly pre-verbal positions of Hungarian is best explained by the assumption that the immediately pre-verbal, VM-inverting position only allows quantifiers that can be construed as predicates. For example, single-word non-intersective quantifiers are strictly barred from this position (as illustrated by the universal quantifier *minden* in (7b)). In generalised quantifier terms, only intersective quantifiers can be thought of as predicating a property that is independent of the nature of the quantifier’s ‘restrictor’ and ‘scope’ sets. This approach also predicts the otherwise mysterious fact that internally complex quantifiers may appear in FP even if they are non-intersective (since some lexical sub-part of the quantifier may provide the necessary predicate) and that even simple non-intersective quantifiers like *minden* appear in FP when their restrictor noun is narrowly focused (this reading corresponding to the use of the common noun denotation as the predicate in question). On the other hand, there are quantifiers that appear only in FP, on the grounds that they are unable to appear elsewhere—as Szabolcsi (1997) points out, monotone decreasing and non-monotonic quantifiers are barred from the other positions of the pre-verbal field<sup>22</sup>. The overwhelming balance of evidence suggests (*contra* Szabolcsi) that these quantifiers do indeed inhabit the immediately pre-verbal position relevant to the FP construction, rather than any distinct but string-identical position (É. Kiss 2001, Surányi 2002, Wedgwood 2005). If some expressions thus appear in FP just because issues of generalised quantifier semantics prevent them from surfacing elsewhere, then it cannot be the case that the syntax and semantics of FP is driven by some very specific semantic operator like exhaustivity or presuppositional identification. Instead, such readings and any discourse-related effects must be somehow derived from some more basic semantic factor—namely a predicative procedure.

Returning to our present data, the predicative account explains why it should be that many of our examples of non-presuppositional uses of FP have non-referring expressions in the immediately pre-verbal position. As outlined above, referring expressions can only take on a predicative role via the kind of ‘specificational predication’ discussed by É. Kiss’s (2004), but this is not typically the case with other expressions, which are likely to perform some other predicative function in any context.

Nevertheless, there are even uses of FP with referring expressions in the ‘focus position’ which fail to show the presuppositional identificational reading, such as (25) in section 5.1 below. One of the advantages of the predicational account over any operator account is that it involves suf-

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<sup>22</sup>These quantifiers may appear post-verbally, but only as de-accented material, when FP contains a ‘focused’ expression (i.e. the immediately pre-verbal position is not occupied by a VM, nor does a VM-less main verb bear nuclear stress).

ficiently underspecified encoded semantics that it may allow for such a situation. This suggests that there must at least be other possible motivations for appearance in the immediately pre-verbal position.

As mentioned above, we believe that there is at least one major motivation for the use of FP which is not fundamentally semantic (though it may have regular interpretive consequences): the salient prosodic contribution of the immediately pre-verbal position. A version of this idea has been previously proposed in the form of Szendrői's (2001, 2003) analysis, which follows the 'interface strategy' approach of Reinhart (1995). Szendrői argues that the position of the verb, or of the immediately pre-verbal expression, as with a VM, is the location of the strongest stress in the Hungarian sentence<sup>23</sup>. Since Hungarian has rather rigid stress-placement rules at all levels of structure it seems quite plausible that certain expressions might move to this syntactic position in order to take on the phonological stress that is associated with it (whereas in a language like English, syntactic structure tends to be rigid, but stress can be 'shifted' fairly freely). According to Szendrői, the expressions that acquire a pitch accent in this way are foci, in the 'new information' sense (i.e. those that can be identified as the answer to a *Wh*-question). This is due to a 'stress-focus correspondence rule', a form of Minimalist 'interface condition' that in effect triggers syntactic movement.

We do not adopt this part of Szendrői's analysis, as the evidence suggests that no single notion of 'focus' is common to all and only the expressions that appear in the so-called 'focus position'<sup>24</sup>. However, this is far from being the only way in which to conceive of a prosodically-based account of FP. It is simply not necessary to invoke the alignment of primary stress with some particular grammatical feature in order to view the possibility of taking on stress as a motivation for an expression to occupy a particular position. That is, speakers may have a variety of reasons for exploiting prosodic prominence and may thus employ the stress-bearing immediately pre-verbal position for any of these reasons. This is the essence of our analysis of a number of uses of FP, including those exemplified below in section 5.1, where the use of FP seems to have no real semantic significance beyond a general sense of 'highlighting' or emphasis.

How could such an approach be compatible with the predicative analysis of FP outlined above? The latter is, after all, a proposal for a consistent encoded semantics of FP, albeit of a radically underspecified kind. Is it not therefore incompatible with a prosody-driven analysis and the data that motivate it, in much the same way as the conventional semantic operator accounts? Certainly, there is a tension between *any* proposed semantics of FP and the existence of the kind of data presented below. Such data seem to indicate that FP performs the most general kind of 'highlighting function', yet we have also seen copious evidence that FP makes some

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<sup>23</sup>This analysis of Hungarian prosodic structure is not entirely uncontroversial, but appears to be well supported by most speakers' intuitions and by the instrumental phonetic work of Rosenthal (1992). See also Roberts (1998), Csirmaz (Ms.) for more detail (the latter including a related Optimality-theoretic analysis).

<sup>24</sup>For more detailed criticisms of Szendrői's analysis, empirical and theoretical, see Horvath (2005), Wedgwood (2005). Csirmaz (Ms.) proposes a similar prosody-based account, but somewhat redundantly also maintains a distinction between 'information focus' and 'contrastive focus' as primitive grammatical features and connects prosodically-driven movement only to the latter.

form of semantic contribution that distinguishes it from what would be achieved by prosodic stress alone. Given that these apparently conflicting sets of data co-exist, we suggest that the predicative procedure analysis of FP semantics is at least better placed than existing competitors, not only because of the positive evidence for it mentioned above, but also because it is sufficiently underspecified to not actively contradict the effects of purely prosodically motivated uses of FP.

A predicative procedure is ultimately just a mode of semantic composition; to get from something as abstract as an underspecified linguistically-encoded semantic procedure to a detailed overall interpretation must involve inferential steps. At the level of basic semantic procedures, we are dealing with something like the difference between (i) ‘an individual  $x$ , which is Mary Brown, has been invited to a party by John Smith’ and (ii) ‘an individual  $x$ , who has been invited to a party by John Smith, has the ‘property’ of being Mary Brown’. One might think of these informal descriptions in terms of the discourse referents and conditions of a framework like DRT; as they stand they do not commit the speaker to contrasting truth-conditions. This changes once the addressee applies any form of relevance-orientated inference: the question ‘why has the interpretive procedure (ii) been indicated?’ is likely to be answered by assuming that a presuppositional reading is intended, such that the formulation in (ii) changes to ‘*The* individual who has been invited to a party by John Smith is Mary Brown’. But this inferential step is not absolutely necessary: if the context is such that this reading is clearly not intended, other factors may conceivably come into play. This, we propose, is what happens in examples like (25), below, in which the FP construction is exploited not for these typical connotations of the predicative procedure it encodes, but rather for the simple highlighting possibilities afforded by stressed pre-verbal position<sup>25</sup>.

It may be preferable to invoke just one factor—either predicative semantics or prosodic motivation—other things being equal. However, it seems that other things are not equal in this case. The underlying semantics of FP, though underspecified, must have sufficient substance to explain the regular derivation of presuppositional and other readings. This contrasts with the very general interpretive effects associated with the exploitation of an accented position, as illustrated below in section 5.1, making it highly unlikely that the one could be derived from the other. At the very least, the data we present here strongly suggest that these are two modes of analysis that merit further investigation.

## 5.1 Prosodically motivated FP: emphasis and ‘justification’

One of the principal reasons to believe that at least some uses of FP are fundamentally prosodically motivated (but not in a way that can be encapsulated in terms of Szendrői’s 2001, 2003

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<sup>25</sup>To this extent, our ideas here mesh with the argument of Delin & Oberlander (2005) that a given construction may have multiple elements of meaning associated with it, not all of which need actively participate in every use of that construction—with the proviso that any ‘inactive’ element of meaning does not contradict the intended interpretation in any way

interface condition) is the existence of attested examples that appear to employ the FP construction purely for the purposes of adding emphasis to some expression—i.e. without lending that expression any other particular reading (such as narrow focus or identification of a presupposed entity). (25) is such an example, notably containing a full, definite noun phrase in the ‘focus position’, but failing to show the reading associated with any semantic operator analysis.

(25) Ha ön felelősen gondolkodó embernek tartja magát, akkor a további tragédiák elkerülése érdekében ezt mindenképpen meg kell tennie.

‘If you consider yourself a man of responsible thinking, then you must do this by all means to prevent further tragedies.’

Nem titkoljuk, amennyiben ezt nem teszi meg önkritikusan, önszántából,  
 not keep.secret.1PL if this not do VM self-critically voluntarily  
 szakszervezetünk ez esetben [a Magyar Köztársaság elnökétől]  
 trade.union-POSS1PL this case-in the Hungarian Republic president-POSS3SG-from  
 fogja kérni annak megállapítását, hogy Ön a részletezettek miatt méltatlanná  
 will ask.for that-of decision-ACC that you the mentioned because unworthy-to  
 vált a bírói pályára.  
 became the judge-ADJ carrier-for

‘It is no secret that if you do not do it self-critically and of your own accord, our trade union will ask [the President of the Republic of Hungary] to declare you unworthy of being a judge on account of the above stated reasons.’

The FP construction is indicated in this example by the appearance of the infinitive *kérni* after the finite future-time auxiliary *fogja* (syntactically, infinitives behave essentially as VMs, in the absence of any other VM, hence the ‘neutral order’ would be infinitive>auxiliary). The identificational operator analysis implies a quite inappropriate interpretation here: there is no place in the intuitive meaning of this passage for the presupposition that ‘there is someone who we’ll ask to declare you unworthy’ and the assertion that ‘that person is the President of Hungary’. Rather, there is a single assertion concerning ‘what will happen if you do not do as we suggest voluntarily’. Within this assertion, the involvement of the President is certainly a notable matter in its own right—as it is in most contexts, due simply to the general importance of this office—and highlighting this is apparently the only justification for the use of the ‘focus position’<sup>26</sup>.

(26) is another example that seems to employ the FP construction for the purposes of sheer ‘emphasis’. Though it is not a referring expression, there is no independent reason for the phrase *harminc méterről* to appear in the immediately pre-verbal position here (it is quite grammatical

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<sup>26</sup>Notably, a similar effect could be conveyed in English with phonological stress alone—television and radio journalists regularly produce examples of this kind of manipulation of intonation, which has the function of implying purely that certain sub-parts of some assertion are noteworthy in themselves. Conceivably, one could link this to a presuppositional reading if one follows the line of Geurts & van der Sandt (2004a) that all cases of focusing produce a presupposition—but since it is an integral part of an operator-based account of FP to claim that this construction is more specialised than English phonological focus, this line of argument could not be used to rescue such an account.

in a post-verbal position and is not in any case the kind of locative phrase that might behave in a VM-like way; É. Kiss 2005*b*). Hence, we must assume that any analysis of FP should account for this example.

- (26) A meccs hőse a mindössze húszéves, hirtelen növése miatt állandó izomproblémákkal küzdő Steve Gerrard volt.  
 ‘The hero of the game was 20-year-old Steve Gerrard, who is continuously suffering from muscle problems because of his sudden growth.’
- A 16. percben [harminc méterről] vágta be a labdát Barthez  
 the 16th minute-in 30 metres-from smashed VM the ball-ACC Barthez  
 kapujába, igényt formálva az Év gólja címre.  
 goal-POSS3SG-into claim-ACC forming the year goal-POSS3SG title-for  
 ‘In the 16th minute of the game, he kicked the ball [from 30 metres] right into Barthez’s net, thus claiming the title for the Goal of the Year.’

The identificational operator analysis suggests that the interpretation of this sentence proceeds via the presupposition ‘there is some place/distance from which Gerrard kicked the ball right into Barthez’s net’. This does not seem plausible, nor is it a natural interpretation of the sentence to treat ‘from 30 metres’ as being ‘exhaustive’ or contrastive with respect to some set of alternatives. Rather, what we have, in informational terms, is a simple assertion of a whole event. The fact that the reported goal was scored from 30 metres out is certainly likely to be viewed as noteworthy, but it is not plausibly to be taken as being *the* noteworthy thing in the sentence, in the sense that the identification of this would be linguistically packaged as the only non-presupposed information. As such, this appears to be another case in which FP is employed for simple emphasis.

However, there is another way to view (26). Note that the expression that occupies the crucial pre-verbal position in (26) is, so to speak, the part that ‘justifies’ the subsequent clause. The claim that the goal described was worthy of the title ‘Goal of the Year’ of course follows not from the simple fact that the Gerrard scored (which is broadly the assertion made), but from the particular nature of the goal: notably the fact that it was scored from 30 metres’ distance. This fact therefore bears a special relationship to the subsequent clause. It is conceivable that successfully communicating this relationship requires a certain kind or degree of prominence to be attached to the fact in question. In this case, the use of FP might be licensed, or even required, in order to distinguish the crucial part of the sentence from the rest, and thereby to give it sufficient salience to be interpreted as the justifying factor for a subsequent assertion. This is not a kind of ‘prominence’ that could be associated with the notion of presupposition. It is also notably not a function that is associated with the use of the *it*-cleft in English. It is, however, strongly suggestive of a prosodic motivation for appearance in the pre-verbal position: one thing that a pitch accent does without being formally associated with any grammatical feature is to lend a degree of salience, and thereby distinctiveness, to the expression that bears it. Something broadly comparable also appears to be at work in the following example, which is quite mysterious from any other point of view:

(27) Mint mondta: Groznijnak ki kell adnia a területén menedéket találó iszlám lázadókat, egyébként bandáikat irgalmatlanul felszámolják.

‘He said, Grosny has to extradite the Islamic insurgents that have found refuge within its territory, or their bands will be eradicated without mercy.’

Putyin [gazdasági szankciókkal] fenyegette meg Csecsenföldet, ha az iszlám vallás  
 Putin economic sanctions-with threatened VM Chechnya-ACC if the islamic religion  
 nevében gonosztevőket védelmez.

name-in wrongdoers-ACC protects

‘Putin has threatened Chechnya [with economic sanctions] if it protects wrongdoers in the name of the Islamic religion.’

Intuitions are clear that there is no presupposition here to the effect that ‘there is something that Putin has threatened’; rather, there is an assertion that Putin has done something: he has threatened economic sanctions. It also seems clear that *gazdasági szankciókkal* is not required to be immediately pre-verbal out of the need to create a complex predicate of some kind; the verb is already associated with a VM particle, *meg*, which would be normally be considered the unmarked pre-verbal element. Thus, neither of the conventionally accepted reasons for occupancy of this string position (exhaustive/identificational focusing or complex predicate formation) applies in this case.

Nevertheless, it seems that the phrase in question is, in a particular sense, obligatorily pre-verbal in this example. The intuition is that *gazdasági szankciókkal* must occupy this position if the subsequent conditional is to be interpreted appropriately, with respect to the meaning of ‘threaten with’. The correct interpretation involves the entire conditional being, in effect, an argument of the predicate ‘threaten’, and this is somewhat contrary to the superficial structure of the sentence. That is, the meaning should be the one indicated in (28a). What appears to happen if the FP structure is not employed—i.e. if *gazdasági szankciókkal* is not in the immediately pre-verbal position—is that the conditional fails to be contained in this way and instead takes wider scope, yielding a clearly inappropriate meaning that is something like that in (28b).

- (28) a. *threaten'(putin', protect'(chechnya', wrongdoers')) → apply'(putin', sanctions')*  
 ‘Putin has threatened that if Chechnya protects wrongdoers, he will apply economic sanctions.’
- b. *protect'(chechnya', wrongdoers') → threaten'(putin', apply'(putin', sanctions'))*  
 ‘If Chechnya protects wrongdoers, Putin will threaten to apply economic sanctions.’

Why should this particular change in meaning come about as a result of the use of the FP construction? Reference to presuppositions of existence or assertions of identity are of no use in addressing this question. What may be more enlightening is to consider this case in the manner

suggested above for (26): there appears to be some sense in which the use of the immediately pre-verbal position makes the phrase *gazdasági szankciókkal* sufficiently prominent for it (and it alone) to serve as the consequent of the subsequently introduced conditional. The implication of this view is that without the structural and phonological ‘setting apart’ that this construction affords, this phrase could not be interpreted as playing an independent role in the logical-semantic form that is conveyed. Once again, the idea that the immediately pre-verbal position may be utilised purely as a stress-bearing position seems to provide a suitable basis for this explanation, though the fact that the FP construction allows for distinguishing certain expressions by linear ordering may also be relevant here.

The examples presented in this section vary in complexity, but all show uses of FP that, rather than indicating the addition of some fixed semantic material, seem to contribute nothing other than a suitable degree of prominence or distinctness to a certain expression. This strongly points towards prosodically-driven occupancy of the immediately pre-verbal position, something that could only be compatible with a radically underspecified semantics for the FP construction<sup>27</sup>.

## 6 Summary

We have shown that the interpretive significance of the Hungarian ‘focus position’ construction (FP), whatever this may consist of syntactically, is not adequately characterised by either of the main semantic operators proposed and widely adopted (though not always carefully distinguished) in the literature: ‘exhaustive’ or ‘identificational’. Furthermore, we have presented evidence that suggests that no fixed semantic operator will successfully perform this function and that instead this construction must be associated with a semantically underspecified interpretation. This is in contrast to the putatively parallel English *it*-cleft construction, which does appear to be inherently associated with a presuppositional reading that is comparable to the ‘identificational’ analysis of Hungarian FP (an unsurprising finding, given the explicit use of a pronoun+copula combination that is found in other identificational uses in English).

The exhaustivity operator account is contradicted by evidence from introspective judgements of constructed examples and we show that it also fails to account for naturally-occurring data. Our corpus-derived data prove especially useful in providing counterexamples to the presuppositional ‘identificational operator’ account, in regard to which judgements are more subtle. We have discussed four broad classes of examples that are problematic for both kinds of operator approach and which cannot be easily dismissed as manifestations of an independent phenomenon: (i) adverbials in the ‘focus position’; (ii) FP co-occurring with non-exhaustive ‘focus-sensitive’

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<sup>27</sup>While this section has thus contained some discussion of motivations for employing certain word orders, this has been primarily in the service of our aim of investigating the semantic and pragmatic nature of the FP construction. We do not attempt here to provide an analysis of all the syntactic facts—notably important issues like VM-postposing). The reader is referred to the various above-cited works for different possible approaches, though clearly our observations in this section are more compatible with some than others.

operators, in particular *többek között* ‘among others’; (iii) in relative clauses, where the expression in the ‘focus position’ seem to answer what one might call a ‘default question’, given the nature of the assertion in which it appears; and (iv) cases that apparently employ the FP construction as a basic ‘highlighting’ device, whether for pure ‘emphasis’ (involving no presuppositional ingredient) or for the sake of distinguishing and making sufficiently salient an expression that is to play a certain part in the logical structure of the proposition.

Examples from classes (i)–(iii) show the need for a radically underspecified semantics FP, which nevertheless must explicably lead to the presuppositional identificational reading that is regularly produced. The ‘predicative position’ analysis of É. Kiss (2003, 2004) and Wedgwood (2005, to appear) fulfils these criteria by proposing that the use of FP induces a certain predicative procedure, whose effect on referring expressions is generally to create an act of identification, leading to the presupposition of the thing thus identified. Class (iv) examples, on the other hand, strongly support the idea that the stress-bearing nature of the immediately pre-verbal position is in itself a motivation for the appearance of certain expressions in that position, thereby creating an FP structure. Contrary to Szendrői (2001, 2003), this prosodically-motivated word order cannot be connected to the idea of focus, as it is usually understood (nor indeed to any particular, semantically-based grammatical feature). Instead, the need to bear stress may relate to various interpretive considerations, different meanings arising in different contexts via pragmatic inference. That English *it*-cleft sentences fail to show parallel readings in these cases is predicted, since stress may be shifted relatively freely in English, removing the purely prosodic kind of motivation to employ a certain syntactic construction. In addition, the *it*-cleft does encode relatively specific semantics, as we have shown. This does not allow for the ‘pure highlighting’ function uncovered in some of our FP examples.

This work is intended both to be heavily descriptive and to engage with detailed matters of analysis. We have drawn upon both introspective judgements and analysis of naturally-occurring data and, in making the comparison with *it*-clefts, we have made reference to work from a broadly ‘constructionalist’ perspective as well as that which assumes a more fine-grained level of semantic compositionality. We see no contradictions here: while it would be philosophically naive to seek description that is entirely free of the influence of theory, it is important that theory should not hamper description. We hope to have provided an example of how analysis that rises above certain common divisions within linguistic science and eschews quasi-ideological commitments to a single methodology can make significant contributions to developing and critically appraising analyses that are carried out within a given theoretical approach.

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