BOOK REVIEW

Daniel Wedgwood: Shifting the focus: From static structures to the dynamics of interpretation. Elsevier, Oxford, 2005. pp 311.

As the title suggests, the main objective of Wedgwood's book is to reconsider some fundamental language-theoretic problems and analyse them from a new perspective. His work addresses such important issues as the competence–performance dichotomy, compositionality, and the syntax–semantics interface. A further aim is to introduce a new theoretical framework he believes to be able to grasp human lingusitic competence more effectively than the mainstream approaches are. Its novelty lies in the fact that it derives a good deal of linguistic phenomena from extragrammatical factors instead of insisting on an explanation which does not exceed the boundaries of grammar. He illustrates his claims with Hungarian data, in particular, with the analysis of what is called 'focus position'. The book consists of nine chapters which gradually introduce the facts and the theoretical background to the reader.

In the first chapter Wedgwood points out that the classical competence–performance dichotomy should be reassessed. This, however, on no account implies that the two domains should be collapsed. A true language-theoretic model is first of all supposed to capture linguistic competence, but the factors belonging to the domain of performance cannot be ignored, either, since they also form an integral part of competence in a broader sense. According to the conventional approach, the grammar automatically generates the literal (i.e., truth-conditional) meaning of an utterance and all pragmatics have to do is to manipulate this generated meaning by providing it with additional content with respect to the context (implicatures, non-literal meanings, etc.). Wedgwood, however, claims that there is no reason to assume that extra-grammatical factors cannot have a direct influence on the meaning of an utterance. Among other things, he illustrates this with the example of the logical connective *and* in natural languages, the meaning of which can both have a temporal and a causal aspect. If inferences did not

have anything to do with propositional meaning, then the sentence under (1) should
be a contradiction:

(1)   It is not the case that she became an alcoholic and her husband left her but
      rather that her husband left her and she became an alcoholic.

The contradiction would result from the fact that the lack of the causal aspect would
enable the two events to be freely permutated:

(2)   she became an alcoholic and her husband left her = her husband left her and she
      became an alcoholic

The sentence under (1), however, is not a contradiciton since the causal aspect con-
veyed by the connective *and* prevents the permutation of the conjoined events, a fact
that clearly indicates that inferences can have a direct influence on the meaning of a
sentence.

      Bearing this in mind, Wedgwood proposes a language-theoretic model that is able
to integrate information extracted from the context into the syntactic-semantic process
of meaning generation. In order to accomplish this goal, he needs a pragmatic model
which provides an appropriate theoretical background concerning how to handle in-
ferences—he considers Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory to be the most
suitable for this. Furthermore, he needs a syntactic model that is able to cope with
partial syntactic representations, ensuring this way that the pragmatic information
can be incorporated at each intermeadiate stage of the parsing process—he appeals to
Kempson's Dynamic Syntax theory in this matter (Kempson et al. 2001). The second
chapter provides an introduction to the basics of these theories.

      Relevance Theory's central notion, Relevance, is actually a ratio. It expresses the
proportion of the effort required by processing a certain piece of information and the
extent of cognitive effect triggered by this information. A certain piece of information
gets processed only if it is relevant enough, i.e., its processing does not require too
much effort compared to the effect it evokes. It is important to note that in Relevance
Theory, as opposed to the Neo-Gricean approach, the 'literal' (truth-conditional) and
'non-literal' (implicated) meanings of an utterance are derived from the same context-
driven mechanisms. The explicit or 'literal' meaning of an utterance (called *explicature*
in RT) is not the same as that encoded by the logical form but it is the result of
inferential processes as well. Implicatures are inferred based on the explicature and
on the hearer's assumptions in a given context, provided they are relevant enough.
Consider the example below:

(3)   John: Would you like to stay for lunch?
      Mary: No, thanks. **I've eaten.**
      – Mary's utterance: I've eaten.
      – Encoded (propositional) meaning: There has been an event of Mary eating
        something.
      – Explicature (already inferentially enriched): There has been an event of
        Mary eating something that she considers lunch on the day of utterance.

– Implicature: Mary is turning down John's offer only on the grounds that
  she does not need to eat and not for any reason that might offend John
  (e.g. dislike of his cooking or company).

Wedgwood acknowledges that the predictions of RT can be easily violated because
they are not directly testable and difficult to formalize. At the same time, however, he
is convinced that it is a smaller problem than insisting on a model which is entirely
restricted to grammar as such and ignores pragmatic factors because this way it misses
what it is meant to capture, namely linguistic competence.

As for the theory of Dynamic Syntax, Wedgwood only adopts its perspective but
does not employ its technical apparatus. The basic idea is that utterances are not
assigned a static structure conveying their meaning; rather, meaning is constructed
gradually during the parse. Incoming words are processed one by one and instead of be-
ing inserted into a syntactic structure they are directly inserted into the incrementally
expanding representation of the propositional meaning. The way of insertion is deter-
mined by parsing principles, lexical 'instructions' regarding processing and contextual
restrictions.

The third chapter is devoted to the introduction of the Hungarian data. It pro-
vides an overview of the basic linear template of the simple Hungarian sentence, the
function of certain syntactic positions and the distributional pattern of certain syn-
tactic constituents. Wedgwood pays particular attention to the position immediately
preceding the tensed verb, known as 'focus position', that has been analyzed in several
ways in the Hungrian literature. He discusses É. Kiss's (1987) 'single position' analy-
sis, Brody's (1990; 1995) 'verb movement' analysis and Szendrői's (2001; 2003) 'stress
based' analysis, pointing out their merits and shortcomings.

The fourth chapter gives a general outline of the syntactic and semantic proper-
ties of focus and it elaborately discusses the issue of exhaustivity. Szabolcsi's (1981)
tests proved that the exhaustive interpretation associated with Hungarian preverbal
focus affects the truth-conditional meaning as well. The principle of compositional-
ity demands that the differences in meaning be explicitly encoded in the grammar
itself. Accordingly, most analyses on Hungarian focus assume some kind of abstract
semantic operator which is responsible for exhautive interpetation. They also assume
a functional projection (Focus Projecton) that is actually the syntactic realization of
the aforementioned exhaustivity operator and serves as the landing site of the focused
constituent.

Wedgwood consistently argues that the idea of compositionality should be aban-
doned if our aim is to create a realistic model of linguistic competence. If we maintain
the hypothesis that each interpretational alternative has its own sematic represen-
tation, then it inevitably leads to the overcomplication of the grammar. However, if
we accept that inferential processes can have an effect on truth-conditional meaning,
then the range of phenomena being under the direct authority of the grammar can
be significantly decreased. Wedgwood argues that nothing prevents exhaustivity to be
derived from pragmatic factors. It seems to be an obvious option to derive exhaustivity
from Grice's Maxim of Quantity that raises the expectations for the interlocutors to
be as informative as possible. In Wedgwood's opinion, however, all phenomena that
can be derived from Grice's more or less *ad hoc* maxims can be explained more intu-
itively in a relevance theoretic framework relying exclusively on general properties of
human cognition. He claims that narrow focus, i.e., the constituent answering an ex-
plicit or implicit question, always generates alternatives. Thus, in any situation where

the utterance is actually the result of a choice from mutually manifest alternatives, the exhaustive interpretation will be the optimally relevant.

Beyond that, Wedgwood also tries to empirically verify that exhaustivity is not an inherent feature of Hungarian preverbal focus. He uses the Hungarian equivalent of Horn's (1981) English example:

(4)   (a) ^{??}Azt tudtam, hogy Mari megevett   egy pizzát,
            that knew.1sg that Mary vm-ate.3sg a   pizza-acc

            de   most vettem észre,   hogy egy pizzát   evett meg.
            but now take   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.'
      (b) Azt tudtam, hogy Mari megevett   egy pizzát,
            that knew.1sg that Mary vm-ate.3sg a   pizza-acc

            de   most vettem észre,   hogy **csak** egy pizzát   evett meg.
            but now take   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.'

In (4b) the focus particle *csak* 'only' explicitly encodes the [+exhaustive] feature, making it possible to contrast the two clauses. If the second clause in (4a) also bore this feature, then the contrast between the two clauses should be possible as in (4b); this is, however, not the case.

A further argument is that the expression *többek között* 'among other things' can precede the focused constituent, cancelling the exhaustive reading in this way. This also indicates that exhaustivity is merely an implicature.

(5)   A: Kiket   hívtál   meg szombat estére?
           who-acc-pl invited.2sg vm Saturday evening-for
           'Who did you invite for Saturday evening?'

      B: Többek között PÉTERT ÉS   ÉVÁT   (hívtam   meg).
           others   among Peter   and Eve-acc invited.1sg vm
           'I invited Peter and Eve among others.'

The fifth chapter concentrates on the distributional pattern of focus and quantified expressions in Hungarian. Wedgwood's aim is twofold: he wants to provide further evidence that the function of the preverbal position is not to encode exhaustivity and he wants to support the claims he is going to make in the next chapter concerning focus analyzed as a predicate.

According to Szabolcsi's (1997) proposal, the different kinds of quantifiers move to different functional projections (RefP, DistP and PredOp) which are organized hierarchically on the focus projection. While RefP and DistP show a topic-like behaviour, PredOp is very similar to focus. The reason why Szabolcsi distinguishes PredOp and FocP is that the constituent being in PredOp is not interpreted exhaustively. Wedgwood argues that the aforementioned projections should not be distinguished and the

interpretational differences (i.e., the lack of exhaustivity in the case of PredOp) stem from the same inferential processes which play a role in the interpretation of focus. He points out that it is not possible to define which quantifiers can and which cannot occur in focus position based exclusively on their semantic properties. He observes that those quantifiers can occur in this position which can be focused in the sense that the set denoted by them can be contrasted with another set being present in the discourse. For this reason, complex quantified NPs always get to this position because they meet this requirement, i.e., they have an element which is able to generate a contrast with an alternative set implicated by the context. This explains why the expression *N-nek több mint a fele* 'more than half of Ns' can, but *legtöbb N* 'most Ns' cannot appear in focus position, while their denotation is more or less the same. Similarly, the quantifier *kevés* 'few' obligatorily and *sok* 'many' optionally move to this preverbal position because they generate contrast with a contextually underspecified set. Along this line of reasoning he argues that quantifiers occupying the preverbal slot act as predicates that take the rest of the sentence as their logical subject. And this leads to the basic idea lying behind his analyses discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In the sixth chapter Wedgwood provides an account of the structural markedness of focus, too. He claims that the functional diversity of the preverbal slot can be attributed to the fact that it is the position of the main predication in the sentence.

(6) (a) János meg fogja hívni   Marit.
          John vm will invite-inf Mary-acc
          'John will invite Mary.'

     (b) #János meghívni   fogja Marit.
          John vm-invite-inf will Mary-acc
          'John will invite Mary.'

     (c) János látni   fogja Marit.
          John see-inf will Mary-acc
          'John will see Mary.'

     (d) János nem fogja látni   Marit.
          John not will see-inf Mary-acc
          'John will not see Mary.'

     (e) #János nem látni   fogja Marit.
          John not see-inf will Mary-acc
          'John will not see Mary.'

     (f) János MARIT   fogja látni.
          John Mary-acc will   see-inf
          'John will see MARY.'

     (g) *János MARIT   látni fogja.
          John Mary-acc see-inf will
          'John will see MARY.'

The sentences under (6) show that the main verb, the focussed constituent and other elements such as verbal modifiers (vm) and negation all compete for the same pre-

verbal position. This position can be characterized by a single structural feature: it precedes the tensed element. The analysis Wedgwood proposes draws on Parsons's (1990) eventuality-based semantics combined with epsilon calculus. In this semantic model, events are represented by variables which are bounded by an existential quantifier. The properties of a particular eventuality can be expressed as the conjunction of predicates over eventualities. E.g.:

(7)   Rosalía wrote a poem.
      $[\text{exist}]e$ (Write(e) & Past(e) & Agent $(e$, rosalía$)$ & Theme $(e$, a-poem$)$)

Existential quantification is needed because this is what makes a mere description of an event a proposition that has truth-conditions. Wedgwood assumes that the position of the main predication is the point where the existential quantifier gets applied to the event described by the sentence. The event must possess two further properties so that it can be bounded: it must convey some kind of eventuality, which is guaranteed by the verb, and it must be anchored in time. These restrictions explain why the constituent representing the main predication has to be adjacent to the tensed element. Since the ultimate function of focus is to make an assertion about the presupposed content, i.e., it identifies the denotation of the focused constituent with the set defined by the background, it can be treated as a predicate. And this is why focus is among the "competitors" for the preverbal (i.e., pre-tense) position. Thus, Wedgwood actually agues that in Hungarian it is the position of the main predication that is syntactically marked and the distributional pattern of the main verb and other non-verbal elements can be parsimoniusly derived from it. This, however, requires that contextual information be accessible all along the parsing process. It is essential because in case it is not the main verb that occupies the position of the main predication but some other non-verbal element (e.g. a focused NP), which lacks the aforementioned eventuality feature required for forming a proposition, then it must be recovered from the context.

In the seventh and eighth chapters Wedgwood investigates the structural distribution of verbal modifiers and negation which has been quite a puzzle for linguists for some time. He shows that his processing-based model can provide an elegant explanation for the syntactic behaviour of these elements as well. He argues that verbal modifiers form a complex predicate with the verb and for this reason they get to the preverbal position which he previously claimed to be the place of the main predication in the sentence. The verbal particle quasi projects the structure of the complex event and therefore it is necessary that in a [verbal modifier–verb] sequence the former be analyzed as the main predicate. Otherwise, if the verb was considered to be the main predicate, then the already-built representation should be overwritten which would violate the monotonicity of processing. A further argument in favour of the predicate analysis of verbal modifiers is that in answers to yes-no questions they can stand alone as grammatical assertions:

(8) A: Hazamegy?
      home-go.2sg
      'Are you going home?'

   B: Haza.
      home
      'Yes, (I am going home).'

This property of verbal modifiers proves that they are actually predicates that can represent complex events by themselves. In addition to this, Wedgwood discusses two more constructions: employing the main predicate hypothesis he provides an explanation for the structure of progressive (9) and existential sentences (10).

(9) Mari öt percig   ˈsíelt ˈle   a ˈlejtőn.
    Mary five minute-for skied down the slope-on
    'Mary skied downwards on the slope for five minutes.'

(10) János ˈnyitotta ki az autóját   kulcs nélkül.
     John opened   out the car-his-acc key   without
     'John has opened his car without a key (before).'

In the progresive construction the main predication is formed by the verb alone and the verbal particle has no role in determining the structure of the event. This is in line with Kiefer (1994) who observed that in progressive sentences verbal modifiers maintain their 'literal' directional semantics. In the existential construction it is the temporal anchor that constitutes the main predicate expressing this way the existence of an entirely presupposed event.

Finally, Wedgwood addresses the problem of negation. He points out that negation cannot be a main predicate in itself, which is also supported by the fact that it can co-occur with preverbal focus. Thus, there must be another reason why negation has to be adjacent to the tensed verb: he argues that *nem* 'not' is a consistently local (narrow-scope) operator whose scope ranges over the predicate it is directly followed by. As a consequence, only sentential negation is possible and the interpretation associated with the *nem* > focus > V word order (constituent negation) can be inferentially derived from it. The advantage of this analysis is that it renders the stipulation of several NegP projections unnecessary, which in most conventional (compositionality-driven) analyses is the ultimate way in which different scopal readings can be accounted for.

In the ninth and last chapter the author once again summarizes the major points raised in the previous chapters and highlights the most important ideas. He also makes suggestions concerning how his model can be improved and sets the directions for further research.

It is beyond doubt that Wedgwood's work is a remarkable achievement in every respect. It provides new perspectives and contributes in many ways to research on linguistic theory. It is important to emphasize that the author knows the Hungarian facts and linguistic literature very well and all the Hungarian examples he refers to are correct. His analysis based on the position of main predications can simply explain a number of 'mysteries' related to Hungarian word order, while the standard analyses

operating with the toolkit of generative syntax can achieve the same only at the expense of overburdening the grammar. The idea that inferential and procedural factors should be granted greater authority in a theoretical linguistic model is by all means welcome. Any model that tries to derive all possible interpretational alternatives exclusively from the grammar, whether it involves exhaustivity or scopal ambiguities, can easily lose its psychological reality. At the same time, however, the question of how the integration of rather vague elements of pragmatics into the theory affects its predictive power is still open.

The examples, however, meant to challenge the view that exhaustivity is a semantic feature of Hungarian preverbal focus are not completely convincing (see É. Kiss 2010 on this). Comparing *csak* 'only' with preverbal focus seems to be a bit 'unfair', since while *csak* encodes exhaustivity in its lexical meaning (i.e., exhaustivity is asserted), in the case of focus the exhaustive interpretation is the logical consequence of the identification of the focused constituent with the background. For this reason, comparing preverbal focus with cleft sentences would be more appropriate. Wedgwood rejects this latter option arguing that the two constructions are not equivalent, though it is not entirely clear why, considering the fact that he also treats focus as an identificational predicate. Besides, it would be very important to investigate whether the analysis proposed by the author can be applied to other languages as effectively as it can to Hungarian.

Mátyás Gerőcs

References

Brody, Michael 1990. Remarks on the order of elements in the Hungarian focus field. In: István Kenesei (ed.): Approaches to Hungarian 3: Structures and arguments, 95–121. JATE, Szeged.

Brody, Michael 1995. Focus and Checking Theory. In: István Kenesei (ed.): Approaches to Hungarian 5: Levels and structures, 29–43. JATEPress, Szeged.

É. Kiss, Katalin 1987. Configurationality in Hungarian. Reidel/Akadémiai Kiadó, Dordrecht/Budapest.

É. Kiss, Katalin 2010. Structural focus and exhaustivity. In: Malte Zimmermann – Caroline Féry (eds): Information structure. Theoretical, typological and experimental perspectives, 64–88. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Horn, Laurence R. 1981. Exhaustiveness and the semantics of clefts. In: Victoria Burke – James Pustejovsky (eds): Papers from the 11th Annual Meeting of the North Eastern Linguistic Society, 125–42. GLSA, Amherst.

Kempson, Ruth – Wilfried Meyer-Viol – Dov M. Gabbay 2001. Dynamic syntax: The flow of language understanding. Blackwell, Malden MA & Oxford.

Kiefer, Ferenc 1994. Aspect and syntactic structure. In: Ferenc Kiefer – Katalin É. Kiss (eds): The syntactic structure of Hungarian, 415–64. Academic Press, New York.

Parsons, Terence 1990. Events in the semantics of English: A study in subatomic semantics. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.

Sperber, Dan – Deirdre Wilson 1986. Relevance: Communication and cognition. Blackwell, Cambridge MA & Oxford.

Szabolcsi, Anna 1981. Compositionality in focus. In: Folia Linguistica 15 : 141–61.

Szabolcsi, Anna (ed.) 1997. Ways of scope taking (SLAP 65). Kluwer, Dordrecht.

Szendrői, Kriszta 2001. Focus and the syntax–phonology interface. Doctoral dissertation, University College London.

Szendrői, Kriszta 2003. A stress-based approach to the syntax of Hungarian focus. In: The Linguistic Review 20 : 37–78.