

Perspective and attentional focus in the narration of the Hungarian children

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Introduction

- The production of a narrative text is a complex task: linearization and referential cohesion are essential.
- Linearization = cognitive researches: initial position, salience.
= discourse linguistics: theme, topic, old information, degree of communicative dynamism (Ho-Dac 2007).
- The present study = searching the relationship between both of these directions.
- Topic and focus = terminological and conceptual complexity, problems resulting from the different analytical levels (syntactic, semantic, functional, cognitive, psychological) → different research purposes (Galmiche 1992) → frequent confusion of the syntactic and discursive factors of the polysemic notions of the topic and the focus.

Characteristics of Hungarian Language

- Agglutinative language of the Finno-Ugrian language family.
- Defined as having SVO (subject-verb-object) canonical word order – very flexible and perhaps best described as being pragmatically determined (topic-focus-comment information flow).
- Pro-drop, transitive verb forms can include an object marker (2 types of conjugation depending on the definiteness of the object: general conjugation and definite conjugation).
- Each argument is case-marked for grammatical relation (17 cases).
- No gender.

Adopted definitions in this study (1abc):

- **Discursive local topic:** aboutness, perspective + connectivity functions, background, known or deductible, weak degree of the communicative dynamism, place anywhere in the clause;
- **Discursive local focus:** salience, center of attention, foreground, known or new, strong degree of the communicative dynamism, initial place in the clause.

(1) a. a fiú vett egy könyv-et.
DEF boy buy.PAS.3SG INDEF book-ACC
The boy has bought a book.

és kölcsön-ad-t-a a lány-nak.
and lend-give-PAS-3SD DEF girl-DAT

↓
focus + topique

And [he] has lent [it] to the girl.

b. a fiú vett egy könyv-et.
DEF boy buy.PAS.3SG INDEF book-ACC
The boy has bought a book.

a lány is akar-t-a.
DEF girl too want-PAS-3SD
The girl wanted [it] too.

tehát kölcsön-ad-t-a neki
so lend-give-PAS-3SD PP.DAT

↓ ↓
focus topique

So, [he] has lent [it] to her.

c. a fiú vett egy könyv-et.
 DEF boy buy.PAS.3SG INDEF book-ACC
 The boy has bought a book.

a lány olvas-ni akar-t valami-t.
 DEF girl read-INF want-PAS-3SG something-ACC
 The girl wanted to read something.

tehát kölcsön-ad-t-a neki
 so lend-give-PAS-3SD PP.DAT
 ↓ ↓
 focus topique

So, [he] has lent [it] to her

- Hypothesis:**
- Hungarian children = association of the topic and the focus in the initial position – cognitively and linguistically easier.
 - Increasing of the dissociation of the topic and the focus with age although their association remains more frequent.

Methodology

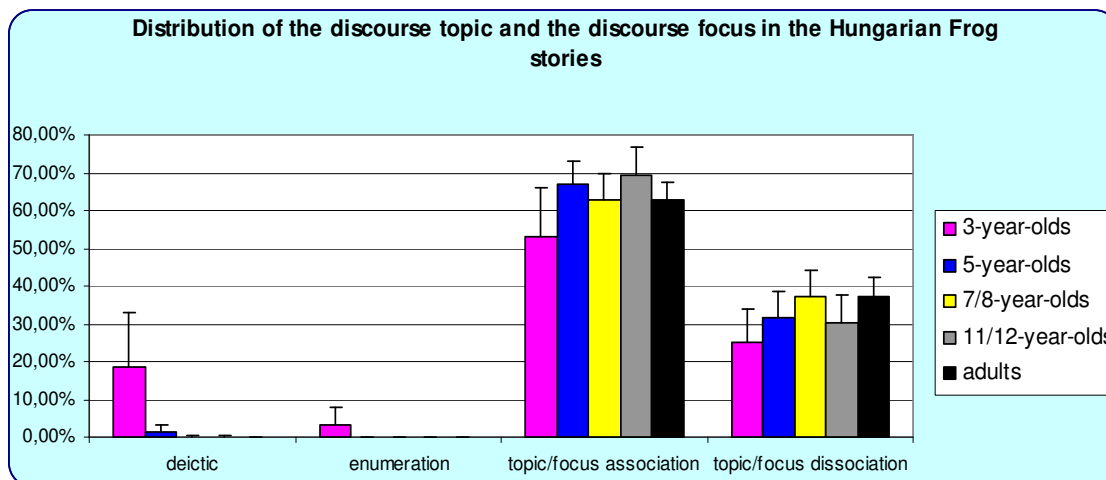
Corpus:

- 5 age groups: 3-year-olds, 5-year-olds, 7/8-year-olds, 11/12-year-olds, and adults of monolingual Hungarian native speakers (15 subjects in each group).
- The narrative task: a series of pictures with no text (*Frog, Where are you?* Mayer, 1969) which recounts the adventures of two principal characters (a boy and a dog) in search of their runaway frog. Over the course of the story the boy and the dog encounter a host of secondary characters (a mole, an owl, a swarm of bees and a deer).

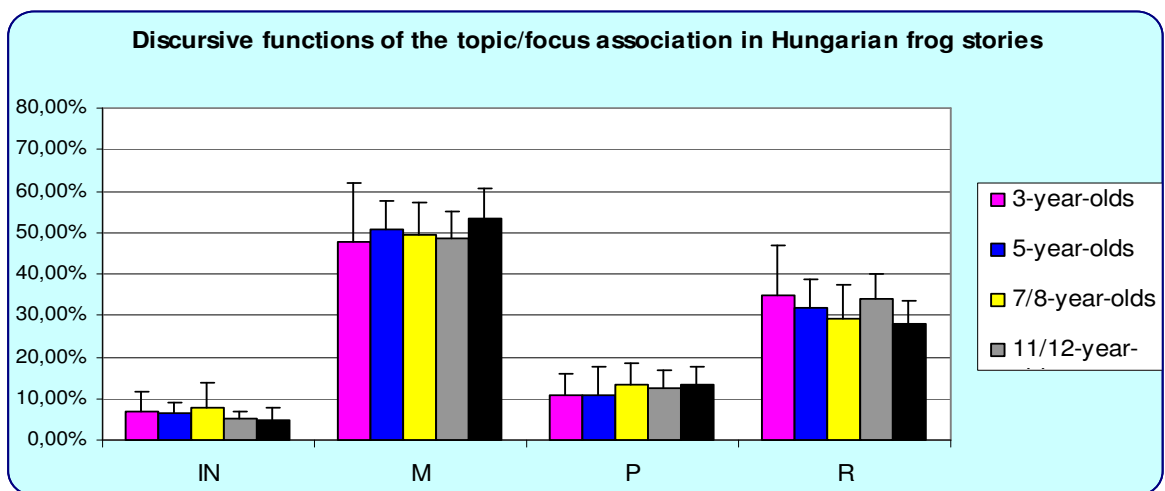
Coding:

- A coding system employed to account for the linguistic form and discursive function of every animate and inanimate character:
 - **Introduction** (Dik 1997): The first mention of a character in the role of the topic and/or the focus.
 - **Maintain** (Dik 1997): Character maintained in topic and/or focus status in the following clause.
 - **Promotion** (Jisa 2000): Character mentioned in a role other than that of the topic and/or focus, and then used as topic and/or focus in the following clause.
 - **Reintroduction** (Dik 1997): Character reintroduced in topic and/or focus role.

Results



- Overall: preferred association of the topic and the focus roles (2ab).
- 3-year-olds: fewer association than the other age groups because of the use of deictic expressions.
- Frequency increasing of the dissociation of the topic and focus roles until the age of 7/8.
- 11/12-year-olds: fewer topic/focus dissociation than the 7/8-year-olds and adults.



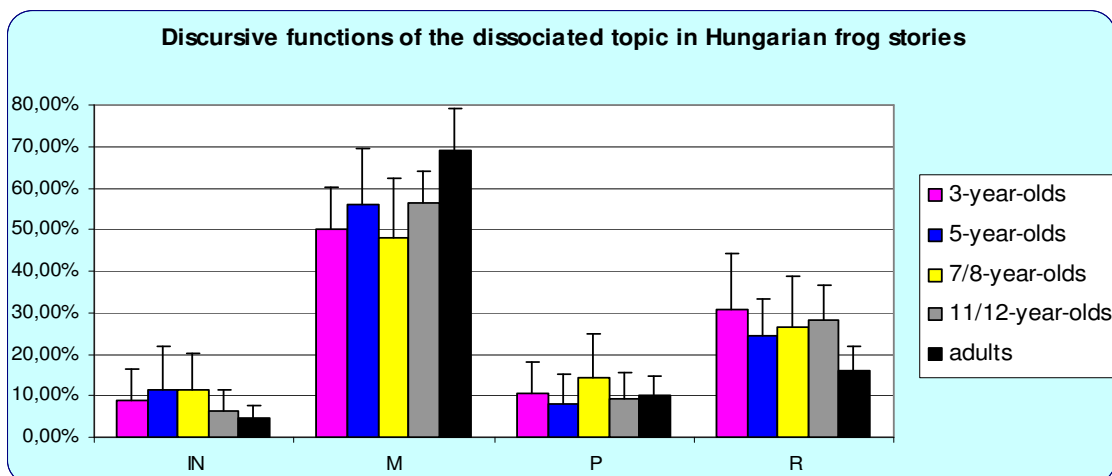
- Overall: preferred M function (2ab).
- Non significant increasing of M.
- Non significant decreasing of R.
- No differences in IN and in P.

(2) a. és itt van-nak a szúnyog-ok.
 and here be.PR-PL DEF mosquito-PL
 and here are the mosquitos.

itt [F+T a szúnyog-nak] le-es-ett a ház-a.
 here DEF mosquito-DAT PV-fall-PAS.3S DEF house-POSS
 here, the house of the mosquito has been failed. (3;03.e)

b. a kutya le-ver-t-e a darázs-fészket.
 DEF dog PV-hit-PAS-3SD DEF bee-nest-ACC
 the dog hit down the nest of the bees.

és [F+T a kutya után] ment-ek a méhek.
 and DEF dog behind go.PAS-3PL DEF bee-PL
 and the bees have gone behind the dog. (7;07.c)



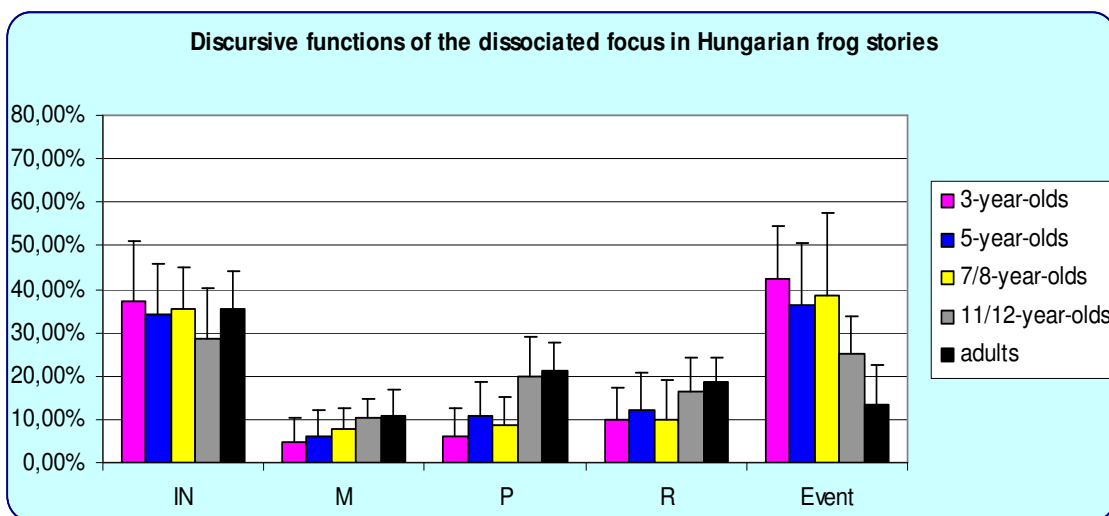
- Overall: preferred M.
- Significant differences in M and in R between children (3a) and adults (3b).
- Increasing in M and decreasing in R.
- No significant differences in IN and in P

(3) a. utána a kutya villámgyorsan el-fut-ott.
 then DEF dog rapidly PV-run-PAS.3S
 then, the dog ran away rapidly.

a kis-fiú-t meg föl-lök-t-[T e].
 DEF little-boy-ACC besides PV-push-PAS-3SD
 besides, [he] knocked the little boy down. (5;11.i)

b. hogy ott van a béku-ci.
 that there be.PR.3S DEF frog-DIM
 that the little frog is there.

aki-t keres-t-[T ek].
 REL-ACC look.for-PAS-3PLD
 that [they] looked for. (21;07.n)



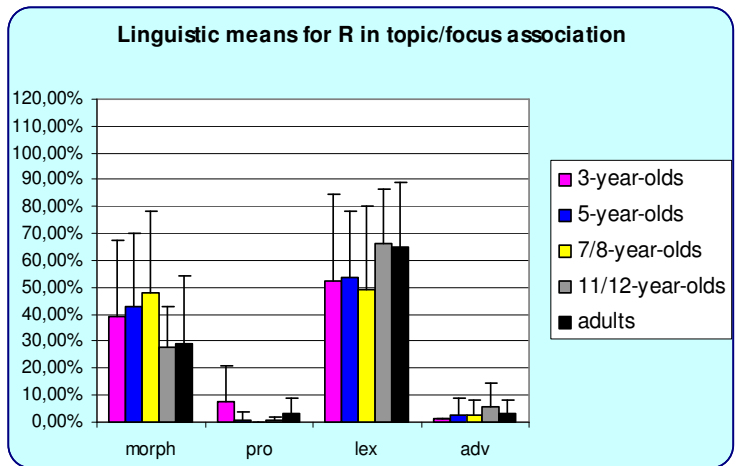
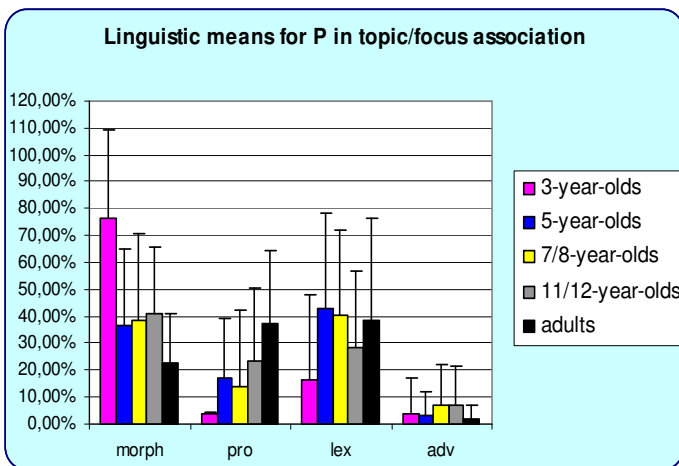
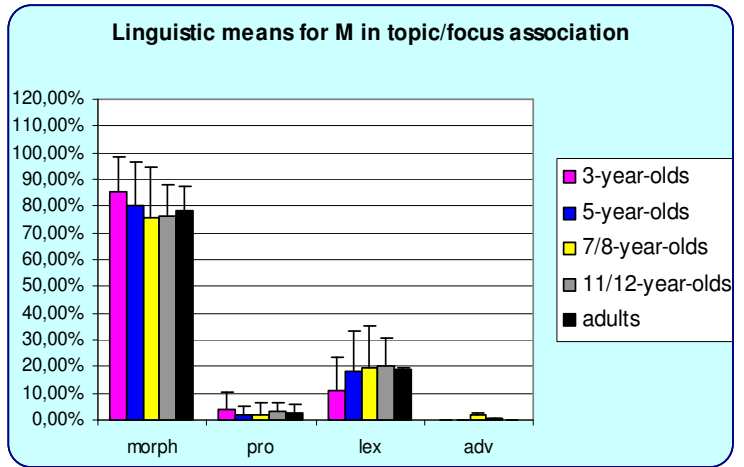
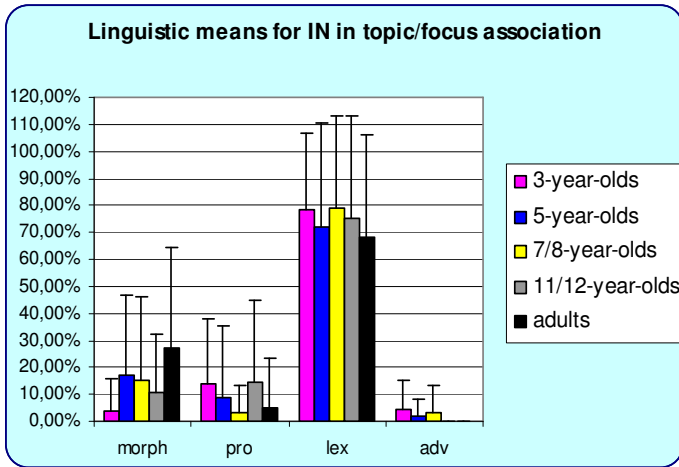
- Children groups: preference of the alternation of IN and the event focalization until the age of 7/8 (4a, 8ab).
- Adult group: preferred IN (4b).
- Clear decreasing of the event focalization.
- Significant increasing of P and R.
- Non significant increasing of M.

(4) a. és fel-áll-t rá.
 and PV-stand-PAS.3S PP3S.SUB
 and [he] stood up on it.

amikor még [F egy bagoly] figyel-t-[T e].
 while again INDEF owl look.at-PAS-3SD
 while an owl still looking at him. (3;11.1)

b. itt sem talál-t-a azonban a béká-t.
 here either find-PAS.3SD but DEF frog-ACC
 but [he] did not found the frog here either.

viszont [F egy ideges vakond] meg-csíp-t-e [T az orr-á-t].
 but INDEF nerveux mole PV-bite-PAS-3SD DEF nose-POS-ACC
 but a nervous mole had bitten his nose. (19;06.d)



- Overall: preference for lex in IN and for morph in M.
- Significant differences in P:
 - 3-year-old = excessive use of morph at a cost of lex (5a);
 - pro increases with age.
- Significant differences in R:
 - children's groups until the age of 7/8 = morph (5b);
 - 11/12-year-olds and adults = lex.

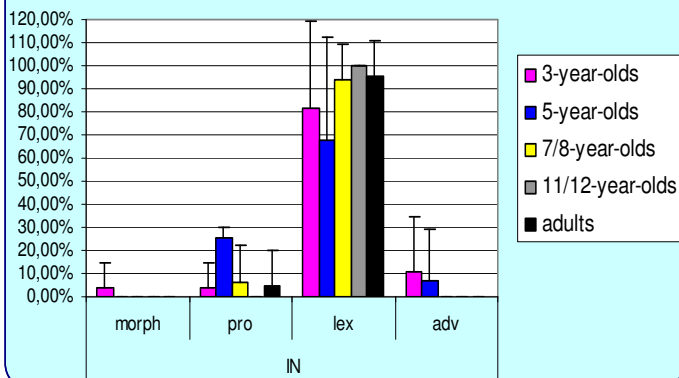
(5) a. na meg-lát-t-a a legy-et.
 na PV-perceive-PAS-3SD DEF fly-ACC
 na! he perceived the fly.

aztán ki-jö[_{T+F} tt].
 then PV-come.PAS.3S
 then, [he] came out. (3;07.f)

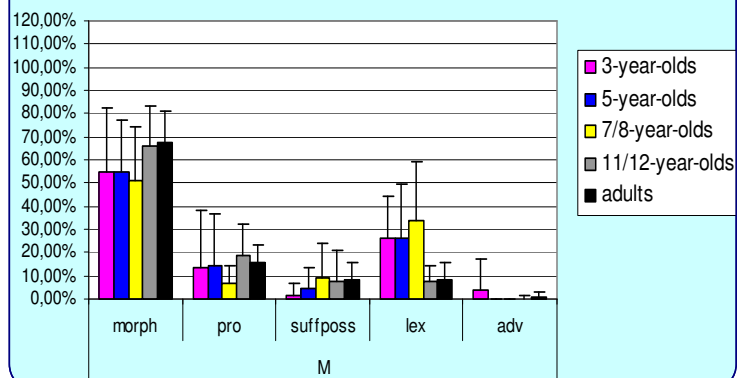
b. itt ameddig alud-t.
 here while sleep-PAS.3S
 here, while he was sleeping.

így ki-szök-[_{T+F} ött].
 like this PV-escape-PAS.3S
 she escaped like this. (7;06.a)

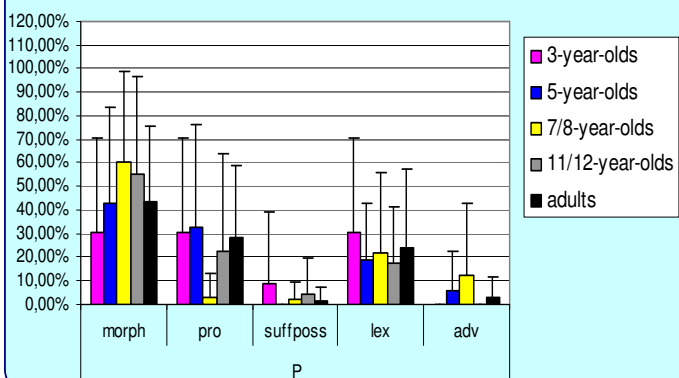
Linguistic means for IN in dissociated topic



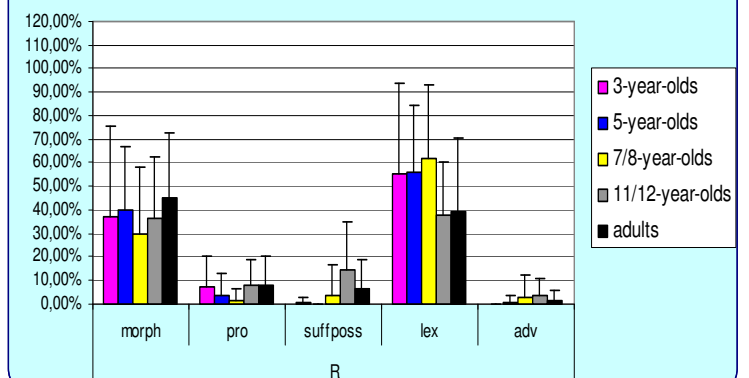
Linguistic means for M in dissociated topic



Linguistic means for P in dissociated topic



Linguistic means for R in dissociated topic



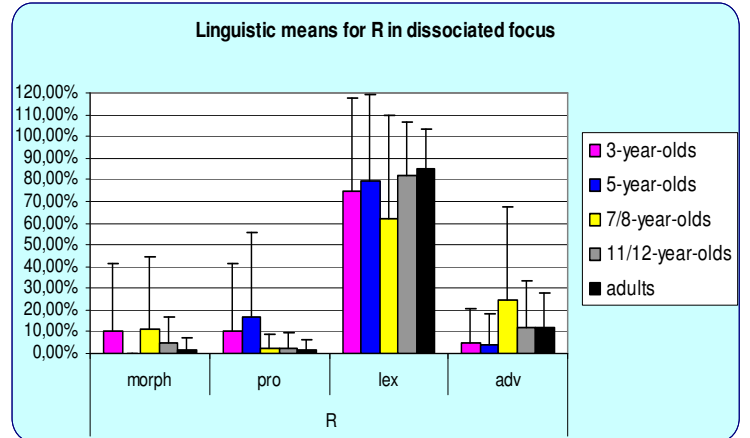
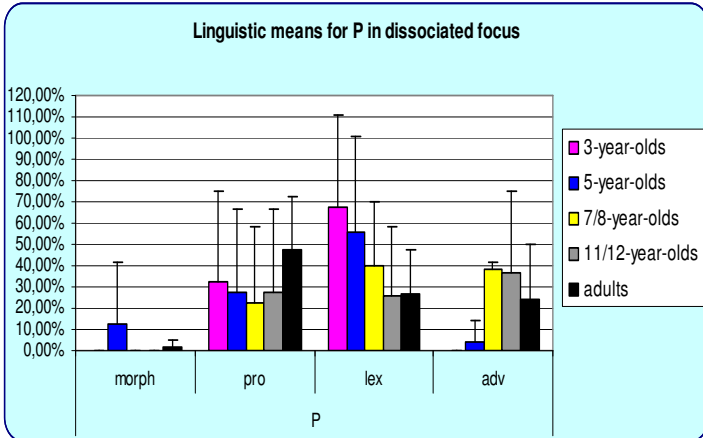
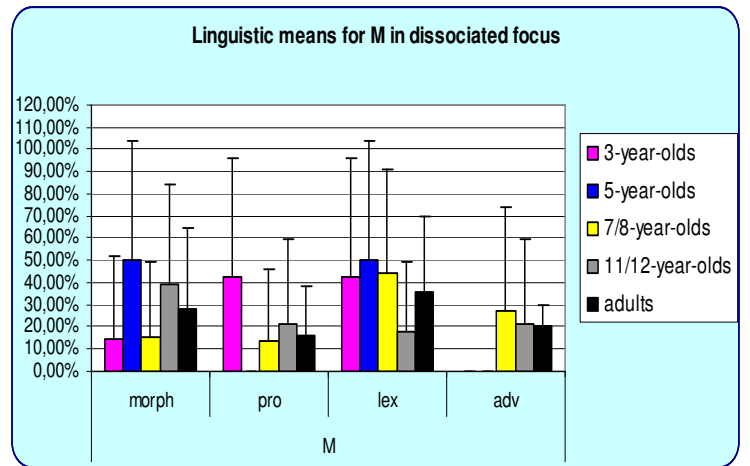
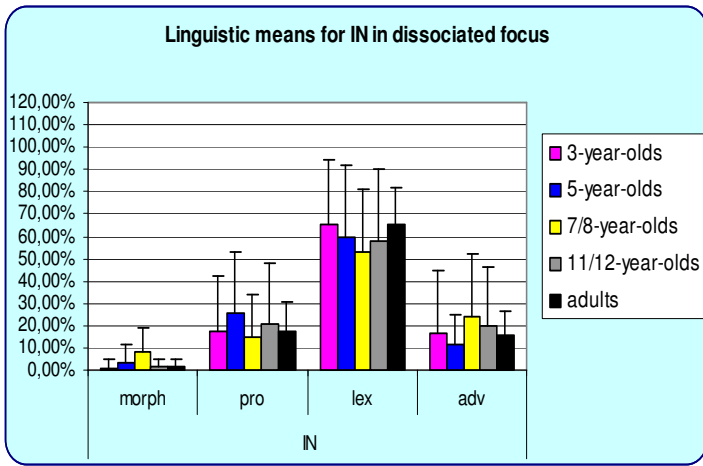
- Overall: preference for lex in IN and in R, and for morph in M.
- 5-year-olds: considerable use of pro in IN.
- Significant differences in M:
 - children until the age of 7/8 = more lex (6a);
 - 11/12-year-olds and adults = more morph.
- Significant differences in P:
 - 3-year-olds = alternation between morph, pro, and lex;
 - 7/8-year-olds and 11/12-year-olds = more morph.
- Significant differences in R:
 - children's groups until the age of 7/8 = lex;
 - 11/12-year-olds and adults = lex and morph (6b).

(6) a. a kutyá-nak bele-szorul-t a fej-é-re a üveg.
 DEF dog-DAT PV-get.stuck-PAS.3S DEF head-POS-SUB DEF jar
 the jar get stuck on the dog's head.

le-es-ett [T a kutya].
 PV-fall-PAS.3S DEF dog
 the dog felt down. (8;00.b)

b. ami mögött ott volt egy szarvas.
 REL behind there be.PAS.3S INDEF deer
 behind which there was a deer.

aki-nek végülis így rá-dől-[T t] az agancs-á-ra.
 REL-DAT in fact like this PV-lean.on.PAS.3S DEF horn-POS-SUB
 to the horn of wich he leaned on. (11;04b)



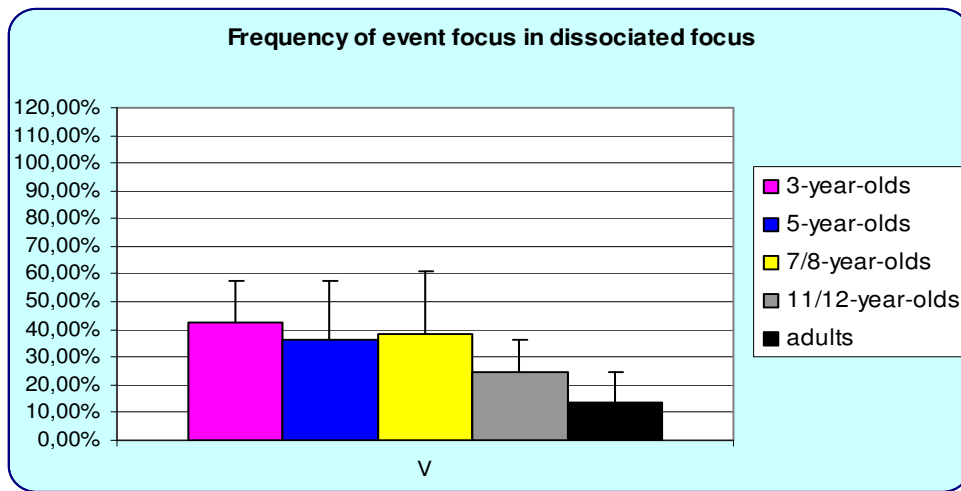
- Overall: preferred lex in IN.
- Some differences in M:
 - 3-year-olds = pro and lex;
 - 5-year-olds = morph and lex;
 - 7/8-year-olds = lex and adv;
 - 11/12-year-olds = morph;
 - adults = morph and lex.
- Significant differences in P:
 - 3 and 5-year-olds = lex that decreases with age (7a);
 - 7/8 and 11/12-year-olds = lex and adv;
 - adults = pro (7b).
- Significant differences in R:
 - preferred lex excepting 7/8-year-olds;
 - 5-year-olds = more pro;
 - 7/8-year-olds = more adv.

(7) a. és haragud-ott a kutyá-já-ra.
 and be.angry-PAS.3S DEF dog-POS-SUB
 and he went angry after his dog.

de [F a kutya] meg meg-nyal-t a ő-t.
 but DEF dog however PV-lick-PAS-3SD DEF PP3S-ACC
 but the dog however licked him. (5;11.i)

b. egy kis-fiú talál-t egy nap az erdő-ben egy béká-t.
 INDEF little-boy find-PAS.3SG INDEF day DEF wood-INE INDEF frog-ACC
 one day, a little boy has found a frog in the wood.

[F ami-t] haza-vitt magá-val.
 REL-ACC home-bring itself-COM
 which he brought home with him (19;11.g)



- Children: 40% of the dissociated focalization = event focus (8ab).
- Event focus considerably decreases with age.

(8) a. nincs itt a béka.
 not.be.PR.3S here DEF frog
 the frog is not here.

azért mert [EF ki-szök-ött] a béka.
 because PV-escape-PAS.3S DEF frog
 because the frog has escaped. (3;03.i)

b. és még hogy szól a méh-ecské-k-nek.
 and again then say a word.PR.3S DEF bee-DIM-PL-DAT
 and again he says a word to the little bees.

és [EF haragud-ik] a kis-fiú.
 and be.angry-PR.3S DEF little-boy
 and the little boy went angry. (5;00.p)

Conclusion

- Topic/focus association is preferred while their dissociation increases with age = the association is cognitively and linguistically easier → the same frequency of discursive functions attested from the age of 3.
- More difficulty is observed in the management of discursive functions in the topic/focus dissociation until the age of 7/8.
- The dissociated focus is generally employed by the children to introduce new elements and to focalize events in the discourse → no mastery of the focus' discursive functions destined for old constituents until the age of 7/8 → preference for event focus in this case.
- The inventory of the linguistic forms for each function is generally the same and it is already used from the age of 3.
- The more difficult task for Hungarian children = the association of the linguistic expressions to the suitable discursive functions.

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