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## Identificational focus versus information focus

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### Abstract

This article argues that identificational focus, which expresses exhaustive identification and occupies the specifier of a functional projection, must be distinguished in language description from information focus, which conveys new information and involves no syntactic reordering. The properties of the two types of focus are established on the basis of Hungarian and English material. It is argued that the cleft constituent is the realization of identificational focus in English. *Only*-phrases are analyzed as identificational foci carrying an evaluative presupposition. The feature specification of identificational focus is shown to be subject to parametric variation: the focus operators of various languages are specified for the positive value of either or both of the features [ +exhaustive ] and [ +contrastive ].

## IDENTIFICATIONAL FOCUS VERSUS INFORMATION FOCUS

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This article argues that identificational focus, which expresses exhaustive identification and occupies the specifier of a focused projection, must be distinguished in language description from information focus, which conveys new information and involves no syntactic reordering. The properties of the two types of focus are established on the basis of Hungarian and English material. It is argued that English is deficient in the realization of identificational focus in English. *Only*-phrases are analyzed as identificational foci carrying an exhaustive presupposition. The feature specification of identificational focus is shown to be subject to parametric variation: the same operation of various languages are specified for the positive value of either or both of the features [± exhaustive] and [± contrastive].\*

I will put forth two major claims in this article: first, that IDENTIFICATIONAL FOCUS (sometimes also called contrastive focus) has to be consistently distinguished from a mere INFORMATION FOCUS (or presentational focus), as it has syntactic and semantic properties that a mere information focus does not share. Second, I will show that the identificational focus itself is not uniform across languages: it is associated with different subsets of a set of semantic features.

Identificational focus and information focus are often mingled in language description, which leads to contradictory statements on focus. I identify the syntactic and semantic properties of identificational focus on the basis of Hungarian and English material, and argue that English, like Hungarian, is a language with visible identificational focus movement. The identificational focus is realized as a cleft constituent. I then discuss a special type of identificational focus: the *only*-phrase, and finally I compare the feature content of the identificational focus of Hungarian and English with the feature contents of its Italian, Rumanian, Catalan, Greek, Arabic, and Finnish counterparts.

1. A NEGLECTED DISTINCTION. The claim that two different types of focus can be distinguished—one expressing a quantification-like operation, and another merely conveying nonpresupposed information—has been present in the linguistic literature for a long time (see, for example, Halliday 1967 and Rochement 1986), although the interpretations attributed to the two focus notions (variously called CONTRASTIVE FOCUS VERSUS PRESENTATIONAL FOCUS, NARROW FOCUS VERSUS WIDE FOCUS, or in this article, IDENTIFICATIONAL FOCUS VERSUS INFORMATION FOCUS) have not always been exactly the same.

I will apply the term IDENTIFICATIONAL FOCUS to a constituent bearing the following semantic-communicative role in the sentence:

- (1) The function of identificational focus: An identificational focus represents a subset of the set of contextually or situationally given elements for which the predicate phrase can potentially hold; it is identified as the exhaustive subset of this set for which the predicate phrase actually holds.

Semantically, the constituent called identificational focus represents the value of the variable bound by an abstract operator expressing exhaustive identification. Syntacti-

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