

The chair of English Linguistics (Prof. Gergel)
invites you to the guest lecture:



**Thursday, Jan. 30, 2025, 10 am,
Campus A 2 2, room 1.20.1**

Prof. Balázs Surányi, HUN-REN Research Centre for Linguistics, Budapest, Hungary

Preschoolers' comprehension of prosodically marked focus: New evidence from logical scope interpretation in negated sentences

A large part of the existing empirical research suggests that children's acquisition of information structure is a particularly prolonged process, pointing to non-adult-like performance at preschool ages, especially in sentence comprehension. This has been best demonstrated for the interpretation of prosodically marked focus.

Most previous experimental studies targeting preschoolers' comprehension of prosodic focus collected responses in tasks that required children to correctly identify the set of focus alternatives licensed by focus-marking. Pursuing a different strategy, this talk investigates the comprehension of sentence-level focus at preschool ages by capitalizing on a general and systematic effect it has on logical scope. Specifically, in adults' sentence interpretation, focus on negation is known to be preferably associated with wide scope of negation over scope-bearing arguments.

In a modified TVJ study conducted with Hungarian preschoolers and adult controls, we tested the interpretation of negated disjunctive sentences like "The donkey doesn't like tangerines or oranges" in two prosodic realizations: with broad focus prosody and with prosodic focus on negation. The outcomes strongly suggest that preschool children already have the competence to exploit prosodic focus marking to interpret sentence-level focus in an adult-like manner to guide logical scope resolution. The failure of many previous offline experiments to reveal preschoolers' adult-like interpretation of focus-marking, then, may have to do not with children's receptive competence itself to compute focus interpretation based on prosodic cues, but with their difficulties with other aspects of the particular comprehension tasks employed that go beyond the assignment of basic information structural roles.