

Word order and its Interfaces with Prosody and Semantics: the Case of Scrambling

Volker Struckmeier

In this talk, I discuss various solutions proposed for the representation and explanation of scrambling movements in German (and similar phenomena in related languages, e.g. pull-type scrambling in Dutch, object shift in the Scandinavian languages, etc.). All of these are concerned with factors that aim to explain what drives (or hinders) word order changes such as in (1):

Gestern habe ich den Kindern den Schnaps gegeben.
Gestern habe den Schnaps den Kindern ICH gegeben.

[...many more permutations possible ...]
Gestern habe ich den Schnaps den Kindern gegeben.
yesterday have I the booze to-the kids given
"Yesterday, I gave the booze to the children."

I will report the results of experimental studies that show the following:

- Prosody seems to be an important factor for scrambling, but
- semantic factors override prosodic factors, and
- syntactic restrictions cannot be overruled by any other factor.

I will argue for the following points:

- Standard syntactic solutions for scrambling are inadequate empirically, since they cannot capture the optionality that holds for many instances of scrambling. These syntactic solutions are also undesirable theoretically, because they are demonstrably circular.
- Purely surface-oriented solutions ("phonological movement", etc.) fail to capture the fact that scrambling can have semantic effects, and is restricted by syntax.
- Information structure only influences word order options to the degree that it can influence prosodic implementations – but not as a category in its own right.

Lest the last point be misunderstood as criticism of discourse research as a whole, I will contrast the scrambling case with a sketch of another phenomenon, ellipsis, in which Givenness, not prosody, is the decisive factor.

In my outlook, I will argue that a number of different factors seem to influence surface appearances in German(ic) – but we can allocate all of these factors to a plausible 'place' in an overall grammatical architecture.