
Towards a non-centralized, subtractive architecture of grammar

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Established architectures of grammar often give syntax precedence over “the interfaces”. I argue that *scrambling* in German warrants the assumption that syntax as well as the semantic and prosodic interfaces express *independent* restrictions, with no precedence of one system over the others. I propose a *subtractive* architecture of grammar which can represent stacked, independent restrictions without precedence relations.

In many (e.g., cartographic) syntactic analyses, information structural (e.g. topic or antifocus) heads trigger scrambling movements. Proposals of this kind, I argue, are highly problematic: Theoretically, the stipulation of such a trigger is a circular device which yields no insights as to *why* the head causes movement in a given language (cf. Struckmeier, to appear), *why* the head takes its *specific* position, or *why* the category constitutes a syntactic head in the language at all. Empirically, our experimental findings show that subjects a) judge sentences significantly differently under acoustic or written presentations, b) are often unable to intuit semantic (!) triggers for scrambling under written presentations, and c) often judge word order changes by their semantic or prosodic *effects* – and not by syntactic positions crossed (directly contradicting cartographic tenets).

To represent these findings, a *subtractive* grammar combines a) syntactic constraints on *formally possible* structures, b) semantic restrictions on *interpretable* structures, and c) prosodic factors that assess prosodic constellations. Since these constraints are applied *independently*, we find mismatches: Semantic constraints can enforce bad prosody, and prosodic factors may cause semantic intransparency, I show. De-centralized models, unlike centralized ones, can accommodate and explain these findings without circularity, I claim.

References: • Struckmeier, V. to appear: “Against information structure heads: A relational analysis of German scrambling”, *Glossa*.