

## **Topicalization vs. focusing and their effects on free word order: results from two cross-linguistic field work experiments**

either oral or poster

Recent cross-linguistic studies propose that languages differ with respect to the effects of information structure on word order. Some languages such as English, French, and Toba Batak do not generally use word order alternations in order to express information structural functions, while word order is determined by information structure in other languages such as Spanish, Catalan, Russian, Hungarian, and Sesotho (see Van Valin 1999, Engdahl and Vallduví 1996, Büring 2008).

This talk presents original field work data (collected by identical means in all languages) that (a) gives partial empirical support for the typological distinction between flexible and not flexible orders, but (b) shows that a binary distinction is not enough. In particular, we present two cross-linguistic experiments that have been carried out in field work sessions in 8 languages (8-to-32 speakers' samples). The first experiment (description of picture sequences) elicits minimal pairs of clauses with *subject topics* (and a broadly focused predicate) and clauses with *object topics* (and a broadly focused subject-verb partition). The second experiment (spontaneous answers to questions) elicits minimal pairs of clauses with a *narrow focused subject* (and a presupposed predicate) and clauses with a *narrow focused object* (and a presupposed subject-verb partition).

Some languages in our sample, i.e. American English and Canadian French, correspond to the language type without flexible word order: instead of non-canonical word orders they employ alternative strategies (such as passivization for object topics, clefting in narrow focus contexts) as reflexes of topicalization and focusing.

Some languages – i.e., Georgian and Teribe (Chibchan) in our sample – correspond to the language type with flexible word order: non-canonical orders are uniformly used in the examined contexts: object topicalization (first experiment) as well as narrow focus on the subject (second experiment) induce OSV order in Georgian and OVS order (with inverse voice) in Teribe.

Crucially, word order flexibility is not always employed equally in the examined contexts. Native speakers of Konkani (Indo-European) and Prinmi (Tibeto-Burman) use the OSV option in order to topicalize the object, but not in order to express narrow focus on the subject (in contrast to the Georgian facts). These facts suggest that these languages display a left-detached position for topics, but not generalized word order freedom apart from that. Furthermore, some languages with functional positions that are sensitive to information structure show that fronted topics and fronted foci have different realization (Hungarian and Yucatec Maya) and are subject to different constraints: Yucatec Maya speakers do not use preverbal object topics (but passivize instead), while they use preverbal object foci.

These facts reveal that beyond the general distinction between languages that structurally allow for different word orders and those that do not, it is necessary to distinguish between languages in which word order alternations are not specified for their discourse function (are just structural possibilities selected to satisfy language-independent discourse preferences such as given-first) and languages in which particular order possibilities are grammatically restricted to certain discourse functions.

*References.* Büring, D. 2008, Towards a typology of focus realization; Engdahl, E. and Vallduví, E. 1996, Information packaging in HPSG; Van Valin, R.D. 1999, A typology of the interaction of focus structure with syntax.