Subject-Object Scrambling in Subordinate Clauses of Russian and German: The Effect on Pragmatic Meanings of Sentences

Abstract

My topic revolves around subject-object scrambling in subordinate clauses of Russian and German sentences (both are SVO languages). I will analyze the topicality effects on this type of scrambling. I want to find out the following: how does Centering affect scrambling, and how would these effects compare in Russian and German?

Below are examples of S-O scrambling in Russian:

N,nom + PRON,dat (unscrambled)

В принципе, это всё условности, я вполне в состоянии сама открыть машину и сесть, но при этом мне же гораздо приятнее, если мой спутник мне поможет. И ему, наверное, тоже.

PRON,dat + N,nom (scrambled)

"Рыбаки России крайне обеспокоены и возмущены той вакханалией управленческих новаций и сюрпризов, которые преподносит им правительство РФ в течение вот уже нескольких последних лет…"

Here are examples of S-O scrambling in German:

N,nom + N,dat (unscrambled)

»Wenn ich der Großmutter einen frischen Strauß mitbringe, der wird ihr auch Freude machen…«.

if I the(dat) grandmother(dat) a fresh bouquet bring which will her also pleasure make

"If I bring grandmother a fresh bouquet, which will please her...."

PRON,dat + N,nom (scrambled)

Der Spieltrieb verdient besseren Stoff, als ihm Stadion oder Börse zu bieten haben.

the playfulness deserves better material than him(dat) stadium(nom) or exchange(nom) to offer have

“The playfulness deserves better material than the stadium or the stock market have to offer him.”
My data sources came from German and Russian national language corpora, which I browsed through until I found examples of sentences that fit my criteria:

- Sentences that had subordinate clauses with scrambled and also unscrambled constituents:
  - Nominative subject followed by accusative object (and vice versa)
  - Nominative subject followed by dative object (and vice versa) → in my data I found only dative pronouns that either preceded or followed the nominative subject.
- I discarded examples with expletives and experiencer subjects.

I analyzed the utterances by relying on the Centering Theory, as well as the discourse- and hearer-status method.

By bringing together the three background readings, as well as the two class readings, I can attempt to figure out whether or not there are any similarities and/or differences in the effect of centering on scrambling in Russian and German. Based on my analysis of scrambled vs. unscrambled sentences in these two languages, I expect to come to the conclusion that both Russian and German speakers scramble the subject and the objects in their sentences in order for the reader to understand what the main point of each sentence is (i.e. what the center of attention in each subordinate clause that has an object and a subject is).

References


