The role of V2 in sentence comprehension and sentence production

Markus Bader
Institute of Linguistics, Goethe University Frankfurt
bader@em.uni-frankfurt.de
Thursday, 25. 02. 2016, 09:00-10:00, Raum: G 309

This talk will review various strands of evidence from acceptability and production experiments and from corpus studies concerning the linearization of verb arguments in German. The order of arguments is relatively free in German in the sense that besides the most common SO pattern sentences with OS order also occur with some regularity. This variability has three distinct sources. First, an interplay of lexical-conceptual and grammatical factors determine a base order that constitutes the unmarked order in the middlefield. Second, phrases can change position within the middlefield (so-called scrambling). Third, a single phrase has to be put into the prefield. If the middlefield initial phrase is put into the prefield, this does not cause a change in word order, but if any other phrase is put into the prefield, word order deviates from the middlefield internal word order.

The main focus of my talk will lie on differences between word order in the middlefield and word order when the prefield is involved. One part of the evidence will concern effects of lexical accessibility and verb semantics. While word order in the middlefield is strongly affected by these factors, word order involving the prefield is much less so. Several production experiments show that participants are very reluctant in producing OS sentences with the object in the prefield. Instead, passivization is used to bring an argument into the prefield when this is favored by lexical-conceptual considerations (animacy, verb semantics). A further strand of evidence pertains to the interaction between different referential means (pronouns, d-pronouns, full NPs), word order, and syntactic position (middlefield vs. prefield). The evidence that will be discussed – mainly corpus evidence and results from acceptability judgments – indicates both parallels and differences between putting an object pronoun into the first position within the middlefield and into the prefield. On the one hand, those factors (animacy, verb semantics) that strongly favor the placement of an object pronoun before the subject in the middlefield also allow the placement of the object pronoun in the prefield. On the other hand, OS order within the middlefield always seems to be possible with an object pronoun as long as the subject is not a pronoun itself, even if this is not particularly favored. Putting the object pronoun into the prefield under the same circumstances leads to degraded acceptability, however. In this case, either SO order is preferred or the replacement of the pronoun by a d-pronoun.