

'Deriving Discourse Configurationality of (East) Slavic' M 3361-G Meitner grant

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The Empirical Landscape

Slavic languages are Discourse Configurational Languages = the extremely flexible word order encodes Information Structural (IS) properties of the sentence, such as Topicality, Focus, Givenness, etc.

Syntactically, such notions are often encoded via syntactic movement.

All logical permutations are possible:

SVO = Subject Verb Object (basic)

SVO	OSV	VSO
SOV	OVS	VOS

The Problem

The Optionality of Movement Problem:

The syntactic movement operations deriving the various word orders in Slavic appear to be entirely optional, i.e., a sentence remains grammatical even if movement fails to apply.

This optionality of movement is difficult to account for in formal models of language and suggests that we do not yet properly understand the relation between word order and IS.

Hypotheses

- There is a non-unique mapping between word order and IS and semantics (homophonous constructions);
- Prosody/intonation is key to distinguishing between various homophonous constructions with the same label (e.g., OVS, SOV, OVPPS, etc)
- Discourse neutrality as a test is misleading
- Prosody can act as an alternative to syntactic movement in encoding IS and semantics (Antonyuk & Mykhaylyk 2013 on the role of prosody in optionality of Ukrainian Object Shift) => prosody is at least in part responsible for the optionality of movement observed.
- Key role of Argument Inversion and Object Shift (Antonyuk 2015; 2020; Antonyuk & Mykhaylyk 2022) in deriving word order flexibility in ES.

Methodology

- Focus on Ukrainian and Russian (East Slavic);
- Apply insights from existing research on Ukrainian to investigate Russian (and vice versa);
- Collect empirical data to map each derived word order to syntactic structure, IS and prosodic contour;
- Rely on the Scope Freezing Diagnostic (Antonyuk 2015; 2020) as a more precise diagnostic of derived and underived structural relations;

Preliminary Results

- The Scope Freezing Diagnostic applied to a variety of constructions in Russian suggests that Argument Inversion is mediated by Animacy;
- Animacy-mediated Argument Inversion leads to derived structures with Focus projection, with Focus projection widely taken to implicate non-derived/basic structures (e.g., Junghanns & Zybatow 1997)
- => Traditional syntactic diagnostics relying on Focus projection contain a confound and are thus unreliable.

Selected references:

- Antonyuk (accepted) Base-generated or derived? Here's how to tell structures apart in Russian. To be published in Annual Review of the Faculty of Philosophy, the journal published by the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, Serbia
- Antonyuk, S. & R. Mykhaylyk (2022) Scope freezing and object shift in Ukrainian: Does Superiority matter?. *Syntax*. 00:1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1111/synt.12229>
- Antonyuk, S. (2015) Quantifier Scopepe and Scope Freezing in Russian. Ph.D. Dissertation, Stony Brook University